

## Come Fiori Fra Spine

Religious Practices of the Order of St John,  
ca. 1570-1660

Matthias Ebejer

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilisation  
of the European University Institute

Florence, 26 January 2024



European University Institute  
**Department of History and Civilisation**

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**Examining Board**

Prof. Giancarlo Casale, European University Institute  
Prof. Ann Thomson, European University Institute  
Prof. Simon Ditchfield, University of York  
Prof. Nicholas Morton, Nottingham Trent University

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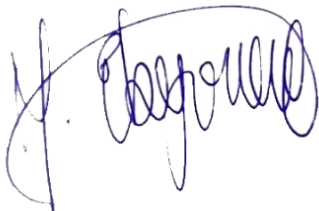
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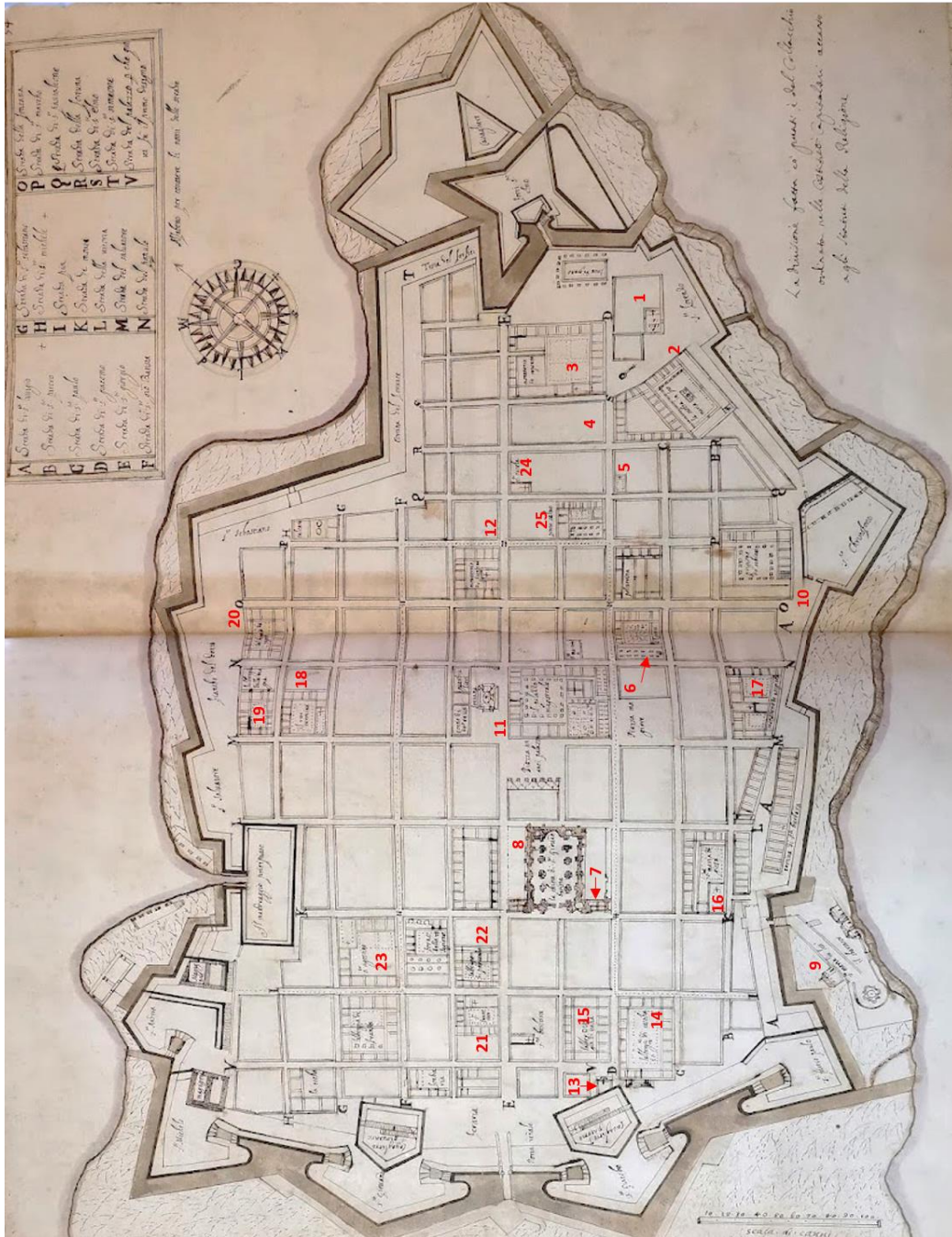




**Map of Valletta,**

early seventeenth century  
(Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana,  
Stamp.Chig.S.334.Riserva)

- 1: Church of Our Lady of Sorrows (Nibbia)
- 2: Sacra Infermeria
- 3: Magdalene Convent
- 4: Camerata
- 5: First Oratory of the Confraternity of Mercy
- 6: Jesuit Church and College
- 7: Oratory of the Beheading of St John
- 8: St John's Conventual Church
- 9: Church of Our Lady of Liesse
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- 11: Magistral Palace
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- 14: Auberge de Castille
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- 16: Santa Maria di Gesu dei Zoccolanti
- 17: Monastery of St Ursula
- 18: Carmelite Church
- 19: Auberge d'Allemagne
- 20: Auberge d'Aragon
- 21: Franciscan Conventual Church
- 22: Auberge de Provence
- 23: Augustinian Church
- 24: Church of St Nicholas
- 25: Dominican Church of Porto Salvo



## *List of Abbreviations*

A.A.V., S.S.	Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Secreteria di Stato
A.C.B.	Archivio di Casa Buonarroti
A.C.M.	Archivium Cathedralis Melitensis
A.I.M.	Archives of the Inquisition of Malta
A.O.M.	Archive of the Order of Malta
A.R.S.I.	Archivium Romanum Societatis Iesu
A.S.F.	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
A.S.T.	Archivio di Stato di Torino
Arch. Aldob.	Archivio Aldobrandini
B.A.M.	Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano
B.A.V., Barb. lat.	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Fondo Barberini Latino
B.A.V., Urb. lat.	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Fondo Urbinati Latini
B.M.L.	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
B.N.C.F.	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze
N.L.M.	National Library of Malta
Triv.	Biblioteca Trivulziana

## *Glossary*

**Agent (of the Order of St John):** A representative of the Order of St John attached to a princely court that assists the ambassador in promoting the Order. Contrary to ambassadors, agents were only appointed from time to time and according to specific needs. Generally, they were not Hospitallers but were chosen solely because the Order felt that their reputations and contacts could be beneficial to the Order. Most received a pension from the Order for their services.

**Alumbradismo/Alumbrados:** A spiritual movement that was predominant in late fifteenth and sixteenth-century Spain. The Alumbrados practised a more mystical form of Christianity, which was contested and eventually condemned as heretical by the Spanish Church authorities.

**Apostolic Delegate/Nuncio:** The Pope's permanent representative in a given country with ambassadorial functions.

**Auberge:** A structure where Hospitallers from the same langue lived together in a community. In Malta, the knights set up auberges in both Vittoriosa and Valletta. Gradually, however, some knights moved out of the auberges to live in independent residences. Before the establishment of a house of novices and residences for conventual chaplains, the auberges were the place where senior knights and chaplains transmitted their experience to younger members.

**Bagno:** The slaves' prison.

**Bali/Bailiff:** a high-ranking member of the Order.

**Barnabites:** Officially Clerics Regular of St Paul, known as Barnabites. They are a congregation of secular priests founded in Milan in 1530, and alongside the Theatines, Jesuits and Oratorians, were set up in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation.

**Barque of Peter:** An allegorical representation of the Catholic Church as a boat or ship, captained by St Peter as the first post, and his successors.

**Beatification:** An intermediary step in the canonisation process, usually resulting from the confirmation of one or more miracles obtained with the intercession of the candidate for sainthood.

**Bull:** From the Latin 'bulla', a decree or ordinance, such as Papal Bull or Magistral Bull.

**Cabreo:** A document, generally complete with coloured maps and plans, that shows all the immovable and moveable fixtures in a territory. In the case of the Order of St John, commanders had to commission cabrei from time to time to document the evolving state of the property. Cabrei were used as references upon which any improvements were ordered by the Prioral visitor.

**Camerata:** A retreat house for knights in Valletta.

**Capocieli:** A canopy that hangs above the altar to protect it from dust and give a greater sense of solemnity.

**Carovana:** Tour of duty that Hospitallers had to undergo to be eligible for office within the Order. Each carovana lasted six months and was generally conducted on board the Order's galleys. Knights were expected to do four carovane to be entitled to a commandery.

**Chapter General:** The highest legislative body of the Order that met at irregular intervals depending on the necessity. The Chapter General had the power to change the Order's statutes.

**Charisma (of Religious Orders):** Unique traits that distinguish the nature and main activities of a religious order, such as predication for the Dominicans or Poverty for the Franciscans.

**Collachio:** A designated area in the Convent City reserved exclusively for the residence of Hospitallers, separate from the civilian population. Whilst the Order had a collachio in Rhodes and at Vittoriosa, they failed to reserve an area exclusively for themselves in

Valletta, the city that they had built. The papacy thought that this lack of segregation made it harder for the Order to enforce religious discipline among its ranks.

**Commander:** A Hospitaller in charge of a commandery.

**Commandery:** A unit of property belonging to the Order outside their headquarters.

Commanderies varied in size, wealth and importance. There were various types of commanderies, such as commanderies of Magistral Grace, Cabimento or Ius Patronatus, which generally referred to different eligibility criteria.

**Compline:** Last prayer of the day, part of the divine office.

**Compositio loci:** A meditative technique, part of the Ignatian spiritual exercises, which encourages the individual to visualise a specific place at a particular point in time, distant from one's own.

**Convento / convent:** The Order referred to its central headquarters as Convento, therefore from 1530 to 1798 the term refers to Malta.

**Conventual Chaplain:** An ordained priest and member of the Order of St John.

**Conventual Church:** The main church of the Order of St John in their headquarters, where all the major liturgical celebrations took place with the participation of the Grand Master and Council. Upon its arrival in Malta, the Order adopted the church of St Lawrence in Birgu (Vittoriosa) as their Conventual Church and eventually built a new one in Valletta.

**Corpus Domini:** Known also as Corpus Christi, it is the feast of the Body of Christ. The date of this feast moves according to Easter Sunday and Pentecost.

**Council (of the Grand Master):** The administrative body that formed the government of the Order along with the Grand Master. The Council was tasked with the day-to-day running of the Order-state, with the assistance of smaller assemblies for each langue, special congregations, and the assembly of the conventual chaplains.

**Divine Office:** Known also as the 'liturgy of hours', read from a Breviary. Each prayer is named differently, starting with the Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, Second Vespers (on Sunday only), and Compline.

**Ecumenical Council:** The meeting of all bishops to discuss matters of faith and the governance of the Church. Ecumenical Councils are referred to by the name of the city where the bishops met.

**Equipollent Canonisation:** The endorsement by the Papacy of the cult of a saint whose saintly reputation predated the reforms in the canonisation procedure. This endorsement is done on the basis of a documented, uninterrupted veneration over a long period of time.

**Falanga:** The ward of infectious diseases.

**Feria:** A day of the week in the liturgical calendar that is not a Sunday.

**Hagiography:** A literary work on the life and miracles of a saint or blessed.

**Holy Infirmary/Sacra Infermeria:** The Order's principal hospital in the Convento.

**Investiture:** The ritual conferral of a title, such as the passage from a novice to a knight, nun or conventual chaplain of the Order. Investiture could also refer to the appointment of Bishops or Cardinals.

**Langue/ Tongue:** The Order was organised into eight linguistic-geographical factions, each responsible for the recruitment of members in that particular region. These were Provence, France, Auvergne, Italy, Castile-Leon-Portugal, Aragon-Catalonia-Navarre, Germany, and England (Anglo-Bavaria in the eighteenth century).

**Lent:** A period of forty days that precedes Easter, which equates to the forty days that Christ spent in the desert before he began his ministry. It is a period of spiritual preparation for the greatest feast in the liturgical calendar. The faithful are expected to fast more frequently and attend Lenten sermons.

**Magisterial / Magistral/Magistracy:** Used for anything pertaining to the Grand Master such as Magistral palace or Commandery of Magistral Grace.

**Manto da punta:** The knights' choir dress, which consisted of a long black robe with loose sleeves. The manto da punta was worn on all pontifical feasts, at Chapters General, the election of Grand Masters, Prioral visits and other sumptuous occasions.

**Martyrologium:** A literary work that outlines the life and manner of death of a martyr-saint. On the feast day of that saint, the celebrant read parts of the martyrologium during mass and during the divine office.

**Metanoia:** To change one's life through penance and a genuine conversion of the heart.

**Miglioramento:** The process of maintaining and improving the Order's assets in a commandery. Miglioramenti were often ordered by Prioral visits and documented. The commander was responsible for paying for improvements from the income generated from the same commandery.

**Oratory:** Derived from the Latin word 'ora' which means 'to pray', an oratory is a space with one or more altars where members of a particular community meet to pray, meditate, listen to sermons, hear mass, and elect representatives. Oratories are typically associated with a confraternity.

**Pilier:** The highest-ranking knight in a langue. Each Pilier was assigned an administrative responsibility such as the Hospital, the fleet, the Chancery, the fortifications or the troops.

**Pious Foundation:** Money obtained from the lease of land or endowment, meant as a sponsorship for a religious activity. Pious Foundations were established by a notarial deed that detailed the conditions for the choice of a procurator who was tasked with ensuring that the foundation kept on generating the money necessary to sponsor the chosen religious activity.

**Plenary Indulgence:** A concession for a limited period of days which forgives the temporal punishment resulting from any sin committed in that timeframe. There were many types of

indulgences, and not all were plenary (meaning full indulgences). Indulgences were issued on the basis of the faithful satisfying a number of recommendations such as reciting specific prayers, visiting shrines or hearing mass on particular feast days.

**Pontifical feast:** The highest form of liturgical ritual. In St John's Conventual Church, Pontifical celebrations were generally presided by the Prior of the Conventual Church in full regalia. The decoration of the church, the music and the ritual itself were more elaborate than in other forms, such as the duplex, semi-duplex, feria or messa secca.

**Prior of the Conventual Church:** The highest-ranking conventual chaplain, responsible for the religious life of the Order. The Bishop of Malta was frequently an ex-Conventual Prior.

**Prioral Visit:** A visit by the Prior or one of his representatives to a commandery to assess the state of the Order's assets. The practice of visiting territories was common to all religious entities. Bishops were also expected to conduct similar inspections of their parishes, called Pastoral visits.

**Priory/Prior:** Commanderies in geographical proximity were grouped together in priories under the direction of a Prior who was generally a more senior knight. The size and quantity of Priories in a given langue varied.

**Privatio Habitus:** The disrobement of a Hospitaller. Members who were accused of grave misgivings were disrobed before being punished. Some were reinstated once they completed their period of atonement.

**pro tempore:** The person who occupies a particular office at a specific point in time, generally used in the future tense to denote duties and privileges that would be enjoyed by whomever would be appointed to that role.

**Probabilism:** A school of thought in moral theology. Probabilism supposes that in the absence of certainty, the best criterion for decision-making remains that of plausibility.

**Proofs of Nobility:** The process of demonstrating a candidate's nobility for the purpose of obtaining admission in the Order.



**Quarantore:** Forty consecutive hours of prayer and meditation in front of the Eucharist.

**Quinquagesima:** The last Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

**Receiver:** An official of the Order of St John in each Priory whose duty it was to collect funds from the commanderies (responsions) and send them to the Treasury in the Order's headquarters.

**Relic:** Materiality associated with or belonging to a saint, Christ or the Virgin Mary. Relics can either be the physical remains of saints (*ex-ossibus*), their belongings (*ex-indumenta*) or even any object that came into contact with either of the former (*ex-brandea*). Although the different categories had varying importance, they were all considered channels of divine grace.

**Reliquary:** Any container that holds a relic. Reliquaries can be in the shape of caskets, monstrances, pendants, frames, or statues, among other forms.

**Requiem Mass:** A mass for a departed soul, intended to help the soul ascend from purgatory to heaven.

**Retablo:** An architectural decoration that surrounds the altar. Retablos are found mostly in Spanish and Portuguese churches, and feature several gilded or polychromed statues, columns and niches, rising high above the altar itself.

**Retreat house:** A place where one went to live a more ascetic life, assisted with spiritual direction. The time spent in a retreat house was typically regulated with portions of the day reserved for communal prayer, the sacraments, catechesis, study and listening to sermons.

**Riza:** A 'dress' of gold or silver plate with jewels that is attached to an icon in such a way that only the face and hands remain visible beneath the riza.

**Sanctuary lamp:** An oil or candle-lit flame in a silver or brass lamp that hangs in front of altars to alert the faithful to the presence of the Eucharist in the Tabernacle or in holy relics.

**Septuagesima:** The ninth Sunday before Easter, starting a period of seventy days that lasts until the first Saturday after Easter.

**Servant-at-arms/ Serving Brother:** The third category of male member of the Order, serving brothers did not have the nobility requisites to become knights, nor were they ordained priests but supported the knights as soldiers or assisted in the Grand Master's household. Like knights and chaplains, serving brothers were also eligible for commanderies, reserved specifically for them.

**Sexagesima:** The eighth Sunday before Easter.

**Statutes:** The regulations that governed all the Order's activities from the admission to the election of the Grand Master, justice and punishment, liturgical practices, finances and the administration of the commanderies. The Statutes were based on the Order's Rule.

**Stolone:** A rope-like stole that hung vertically from the knight's shoulder, worn with the manto da punta. It was decorated with symbols from the Passion of Christ.

**Synod/Synodality:** A process of review in a diocese, where key figures in that diocese meet with the bishop to discuss a continuous reform.

**Tabernacle:** A box-like receptacle, part of the altar furniture, where the pyxes with the Eucharistic wafers are stored.

**Tantum Ergo** [Pange Lingua]: A hymn sung during the veneration of the Eucharist.

**Translation** [of relics]: From the Latin *translatio*, this refers to the ritual movement of relics. The translation could take place when relics are moved from the place of discovery to a church or when relics are donated by one church to another. On the eve of some feast days, a procession with the relic of the saint took place, which is also known as a translation.

**Transubstantiation:** The process in which the bread and wine are transformed into the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

**Transverberation:** God's mystical love that pierces one's heart. Often represented by an arrow or dart held by an angel. It is considered a very high form of spiritual unity with God, experienced only by great mystics such as St Therese of Avila.

**Veneranda Fabbrica:** An administrative body tasked with the construction, administration and maintenance of a sacred space.

**Vergini/Professe:** Nuns who undergo a novitiate and take the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

**Vespers:** Evening prayer, part of the divine office.

**Via Crucis/Stations of the Cross:** Fourteen episodes from the Passion of Christ. Each episode was marked with a physical marker, allowing pilgrims to walk the stations and stop (*statio*) at every one of the episodes to meditate on each moment separately.

**Vice-Chancellor:** A high-ranking official of the Order, responsible for the daily administrative duties of the Chancery.

**Xenodocheum:** A hostel where pilgrims in the Holy Land received shelter and medical assistance. It was from such a *xenodocheum* that the Order of St John's Holy Infirmary gradually developed.



## Abstract

Throughout the sixteenth century, the Order of St John sought to redefine its place in a constantly changing world to survive, weathering storms from within and without. Existing scholarship largely focused on the institutional, legal, and administrative tools that it used to carve a space for itself in the world, yet the devotional-spiritual dimension has largely been left unexplored. The study of the 'faith of the knights' does not just concern the knights or the island of Malta but engages a wider scholarship as a micro-study of early modern piety, religion and spirituality. This study has attempted to decipher the effect that membership in the Order had on an individual's faith and personal spirituality. It considers both the Order as a sum of its individual members, as well as an institution. The emergence of a Borromean retreat-house for knights in Valletta, in the immediate aftermath of the Council of Trent, was an indication of the desire, at least among some members, to live their vocation in a different manner. Consequently however, the existence of an alternative way of life for the Hospitallers, one that was supposedly closer to the spirit of Trent, questioned the existing interpretation of the Order's spiritual charism, and became a source of disagreement. The resulting compromise was a spirituality that was personalised rather than institutionalised. What changed in the approach towards Hospitaller spirituality in the decades that followed, was the growing recognition by the institution itself, that the Order of St John had multiple vocations. To this end, the Order became a melting pot of spiritual traditions, to a point that it would be more accurate to speak of Hospitaller spiritualities, in the plural rather than singular. The downside was a process that was oftentimes inconclusive or incomplete. These considerations hope to place the Order of St John alongside other Catholic religious orders of the Counter-Reformation period, not merely as a military force engaged in religious warfare, but also as a religious entity that reacted, adopted and at times challenged the precepts of a wider Catholic Church.



## Introduction

‘Malta’s knights tell Pope Francis to butt out of their business’ reported the newspaper, *MaltaToday*, on 27 December 2016.<sup>1</sup> For those acquainted with the history of the Order of St John, reading such a headline was surreal, and somewhat inaccurate. The Order has been in existence since the eleventh century and has partaken in every major Church-historical across its history. But those more familiar with the Order also know that the Pope is the ultimate head of the institution, and even though on paper the Order has full sovereignty and the Grand Master and his Council administer internal affairs autonomously, the Pope can suppress the Order with a stroke of pen. The squabble, which turns out to have started over the distribution of contraceptives to third-world countries, shook the Order to its core as it exposed a deeper divide within the institution. The news that Grand Master Matthew Festing was asked by the Pope to resign over the matter, echoed rare episodes from the Order’s history which nobody ever thought would happen again. And yet the historical parallels were lost on the majority of those reading the tabloids, who eagerly commented on social media: ‘how are these guys still around?’ This is the reaction that most historians studying the Order of St John are greeted with far too often; ‘weren’t the Hospitallers like the Templars?’, ‘aren’t the knights of St John members of a sort of secret society like the Freemasons?’.

Research into the role of the Order of St John and the wider Catholic Church, at various moments in its history, is indeed fascinating. On top of the interest that the study of religious orders generates,<sup>2</sup> the Order of St John presents the added layers of early state-building and the accompanying diplomatic and military enterprises. The intricacies that result from this *sui generis* Catholic institution have attracted growing scholarly interest, with some valuable recent contributions such as studies on the relationship between the episcopacy and the

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<sup>1</sup> *Malta Today*. 27 December 2016. Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2023 URL: <https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/world/72941/maltas-knights-tell-pope-francis-to-butt-out-of-their-business#.XmTP-R7nIU>

<sup>2</sup> Some studies include; Armstrong, Megan C., *Politics of Piety, Franciscan Preachers during the Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester and Suffolk: University of Rochester P., 2004); Melvin, Karen, *Building Colonial Cities of God, Mendicant Orders and Urban Culture in New Spain* (California: Stanford U.P., 2012); Bireley, Robert, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts and Confessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2003).

magistracy,<sup>3</sup> and on the role of the Order's ambassadors to the Holy See.<sup>4</sup> Whilst these and other works have largely focused on the institutional, legal, and administrative relationship of the Order with the Church or the Papacy specifically, the faith of the institution that liked to call itself '*la Religione*', remains largely unexplored. Defining what the Order's belief system consisted of is a task that presents many potential pitfalls. Ultimately, the study of the 'faith of the knights' does not just concern the knights or the island of Malta but engages a wider scholarship as a micro-study of early modern piety, religion and spirituality. It seems we forget that even on a personal level, individual members were seeking a meaningful engagement with the divine, just as any other early modern actor.

'The renewed vigour of many Hospitallers' faith as a result of their interaction with ... new religious orders and the wider spiritual currents of the Counter Reformation have been all too often ignored. Yet, like many early modern Christians, they, too, were in search of a spirituality that made more sense to their lives.'<sup>5</sup>

Even in broaching the subject, one is faced with a wall of terms and terminologies, approaches, and methodologies, as well as interminable comparative case studies and connections, not to mention the in-depth knowledge that one needs to possess of ritual practices, lives of saints, religious materiality and canon law. Rather than standing on the shoulders of giants, it could easily feel like standing at the bottom of a well, buried under innumerable scholarly articles and books.

Amid this cacophony of ideas, all exceptional and enticing, one has to decide from which angle to approach the subject. Whilst there is no way of avoiding writing about the institutional aspect of religion,<sup>6</sup> especially when dealing with post-Council of Trent Catholicism, the

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<sup>3</sup> Russo, Francesco, *Un Ordine, una città, una diocesi. La giurisdizione ecclesiastica nel principato monastico di Malta in età moderna (1523-1722)*, (Aprilia: Arcane ed., 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Scerri, Adrian, *The Order of St John and the Holy See: a study in diplomacy through the career of ambassador Fra Marcello Sacchetti, 1682-1720*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Malta (2021); Allen, David F., 'The Order of St John as a School for Ambassadors in Counter-Reformation Europe', *The Military Orders: Welfare and Warfare*, Helen Nicholson (ed.) (Singapore and Sydney: Routledge, 1998), 363-379.

<sup>5</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity* (London: Continuum, 2011), 110.

<sup>6</sup> One particularly insightful angle is the study of how the Order of St John produced and classified archival records. See: Vanesio, Valeria, *Un'istituzione millenaria attraverso i suoi archivi. I processi di ammissione*



institutional framework does not fully explain what the knights believed. The pertinent question was: 'What else were we taking for granted with regards to the field of Hospitaller studies and early modern religious belief in general?' The history of Hospitaller spiritualities, more plural than singular, needs to be investigated by always keeping in mind the double nature of the Hospitaller institution, both a religious order and a principality. Whilst attention has been given to the physical reconstruction,<sup>7</sup> culminating in the new city projects, much less scholarly attention has been paid to the Order of St John's piety and spirituality. A possible way to decipher the Order's religious experience would be to read the Hospitaller belief system as if it were a language, and in doing so, to contribute to our understanding of the effect that membership in the Order had on an individual's faith and personal spirituality. The challenge is understanding what Hospitallers meant when, on seldom occasions, they used the term 'spiritual'. If one had to consider only the etymology of the word, *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality* explains that 'the term *spiritualité* first came to prominence during the seventeenth century in French literature.' The term is/was used to denote a life of methodical prayer, and active service, 'distinct both from 'mere' theology or doctrine and also from fanaticism'.<sup>8</sup> 'Spirituality' was at times used as an alternative to 'mysticism', which was often problematic and looked upon with suspicion. Faced with the limitations of the English language to express the deep sentiment that belief conjured, one could take the more direct approach outlined by David Perrin who asserted that 'Something must lie behind the external actions and events that makes the external expression of spirituality possible. Motivation (why people do things) and capacity (the ability to do things or be receptive to them) are also part of spirituality...'<sup>9</sup> Studying the early modern Hospitaller religious experience by extending the definition of spirituality to incorporate motivation and capacity is both feasible and practical.

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*dell'Ordine Ospedaliero di San Giovanni(sec. XVI-XIX)*, unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Dipartimento di lettere e culture moderne, Università La Sapienza, Roma (2018).

<sup>7</sup> Burgassi, Valentina, *Il Rinascimento a Malta. Architettura e potere nell'Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme* (Firenze: Olschki, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Tyler, Peter and Woods, Richard, *The Bloomsbury Guide to Christian Spirituality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Perrin, David, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York and Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 16.

The main question that this work will attempt to answer is whether we can speak of a distinct Hospitaller spiritual tradition in the same manner that we speak, for instance, of an Ignatian, a Carmelite or a Franciscan spirituality. A distinct spirituality is not to be confused with the specific religious practices, or what the Order called ‘privileges’, which consisted of an interminable list of rituals and liturgies that were distinctly reserved for them, to be practised in their churches, and which the Order meticulously followed and jealously preserved. Rituals and liturgy are, nonetheless, two important *tesserae* in the colourful mosaic that is spirituality, and both, thus, will feature strongly in this work. In turn, a theme that will surface throughout is the ethos by which the Order lived, as relayed in its mission statement: ‘defence of the faith and care for the sick and poor’. If there could ever be a distinct Hospitaller spirituality, the unique blend of piety and violence had to be a key feature of this distinctiveness. Multiple inquiries emerge from the central question on spiritual distinctiveness, each partly answering the main query, such as: How did Hospitallers conceive holiness? Which practices were given more prominence and why? How did Hospitallers pray? What survives of the Order’s spiritual wisdom and how did they record their spiritual tradition?

### ***Methodologies***

Whilst themes of Hospitaller spirituality were previously largely unexplored, the same cannot be said of the history of spirituality in general. The rich historiography provided a strong foundation that the present study has built upon. Three of these works were also rather central in providing a methodological backbone that inspired and accompanied the research questions presented above. These are namely the ideas outlined by Miri Rubin, Karin Velez, and Simon Ditchfield. Rubin’s aptly named article ‘How do we write a History of Religion?’<sup>10</sup> conveniently maps out the various angles that recent historiography has adopted

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<sup>10</sup> Rubin, Miri, ‘How do we write a History of Religion?’, in *What is History, now? How the Past and Present speak to each other*, Carr and Lipscomb (eds.) (2021) 197-212.

in the study of religion, ranging from the body in religious practice (Walker Bynum), ritual violence (Zemon Davies), parish-based materials and artefacts (Bynum and Duffy), the personal within the impersonal records of the Inquisition (Ginzburg), the role of gender (Roper) as well as rupture and continuity in devotional habits across Christian confessions (Scribner).<sup>11</sup> More fundamentally, Rubin stated that 'to see religion as a cultural system is to understand it as a language with its internal logic, its registers, styles and complex meanings. Language is a system, it has rules, and historians profited from understanding those rules and their manifestations in practice.'<sup>12</sup> This language was essentially a tool for the knight to explain the world around him. One clear example of this from the private archives of the Florentine knight Fra Bernardo Vecchietti showed how he found solace in his faith, as a means of dealing with financial misfortune and issues of defamation. In a letter to his brother in 1632, he remarked: *'So it goes for those who were born with good fortune, we should be content seeing how God, apart from having created us and had us be born in a Christian country, has treated us better than we deserve, nor does he ever stop to send his graces; true that the senses abhor these [misfortunes], but considering everything, the tribulations and persecutions, bad ventures and such are the true signs of predestination should it please Him to give us at least repose in glory in the other world, seeing how in this there is little respite, if not even from bad to worse, and with this I conclude by praying His Divine Majesty to grant me fortitude to suffer so many disgraces...'*<sup>13</sup> In a subsequent letter Fra Vecchietti further exclaimed *'I thank God that through this path, He perhaps plans to save my soul, which is easily put at risk through pride or vanity when things were prosperous, attributing to our forethought what were mere graces from God.'*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>13</sup> A.S.F., Fond. Acquisizione e Doni, Vol.13, f.210 v., 16<sup>th</sup> March 1632; *'Cosi vanno le cose di chi nacque con buona fortuna, quietamoci ad ogni modo gia Dio oltre all'averci dato l'essere, e fatti nascere in paese Cristinao, c'ha trattato meglio che noi non meritiamo, ne mai si stacca in concede grazie; vero ch'il senso ripugna a cose simili, ma consideratone bene il tutto, le traversi e persecuzioni [sic], male venturi e simili sono li veri segni di predestinazione piacciali al meno darci riposo in gloria nell'altro mondo, gia ch'in questo si veggio ormai poco scapito se per non vi sia anche sempre mai di male in peggio, e con questo facendo fine prego S.D.M. che mi concede Fortezza da sofferir tante disgrazie...'*

<sup>14</sup> A.S.F., Fond. Acquisizione e Doni, Vol.13, f.218, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1632; *'Ringrazio Dio che per questa strada avera forse pensiero di salvarmi l'anima che facilmente avrebbi Corso risico mediante la superbia o vana gloria mentre andando le cose prosperi attribuimo alla prudenzia nostra quello ch'è mera grazia di Dio.'*

Miri Rubin adds that 'religion became as diverse as the people who lived it, in the sense that all religion was the religion of people in communities, but religious institutions also had the power to inform, persuade and coerce.'<sup>15</sup> This means that historians no longer treat belief as monolithic, but recognise the wide range of manifestations and responses to organised religion that now form the basis of the subject matter. Mystics, hermits, preachers, witches, the overzealous and the outcasts, now share the limelight with the official institutions and religious authorities. Thus, a history of the Order's early modern belief is also a history of religious ambiguity, of grey areas where it is sometimes difficult to ascertain where the institution stops and the individual starts. Concerning the individual, it would have been a mistake to look at the spirituality of the knights as exclusively reserved for the pious ones, those who consistently conformed to pre-established moral standards. Aside from the methodological problems associated with judging spirituality based on documented moral transgressions, a study of religious conviction must consider spirituality as a lens through which our Hospitaller protagonists interpreted and interacted with the world around them. Spirituality entails the belief that the 'spirit', or the soul, transcends materiality to reach an immaterial state; heaven, hell or purgatory, based on set criteria. Their desire to reach heaven after death should not be confused with their moral consistency, since it is clear that 'sinners' believed in this transcendence of the soul just as much as the 'saintly' ones did, which is why we often find evidence of their efforts to atone for their misgivings with both spiritual and material means. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that the present study places those more inclined towards personal restraint and acts of charity alongside others accused of murder and debauchery. The nature of means utilised to bridge the gap between the material and immaterial realities is what constitutes the spiritual language, and even though various religious organisations within the same Church might have the same belief, their approach (or language) might differ. Mental exercises, for instance, are one such tool, employed predominantly by Ignatian and Carmelite spiritualities, as an instrument of penance and exhortation, as well as a way to reach a heightened state. This still leaves the matter of which methodology to apply in order to attempt to answer the question of the Order's spiritual distinctiveness, without getting tangled in theological arguments. Rubin suggests that new spheres of inquiry in the history of religion should rest upon two interlocking

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<sup>15</sup> Rubin (2021), 201.

methods: bringing new approaches to bear upon religion and identifying new types of sources: textual, visual, and material.<sup>16</sup>

Karin Vélez faced many of the same methodological qualms when writing about the *Miraculous Flying House of Loreto*,<sup>17</sup> the Virgin Mary's Nazareth abode that reputedly flew all the way to the Italian town to become one of the most important relics-cum-reliquaries of Roman Catholicism. As Loreto was such an important pilgrimage site, Vélez was not the first to approach the topic; however, she outlined how habits of historical deconstruction fell short of explaining the true appeal of the cult of Loreto.<sup>18</sup> She claimed that what was holding the scholarship back was the overemphasis on one distinct element of devotion over the others. Vélez identified six methodologies that scholars most frequently use, which provide substantial information in combination, but separately are somewhat limited when used separately. Albeit concerned mostly with Loreto, Vélez's six methodologies resonate also with the field of the history of religion in general. The first is a focus on the object, in her case the Holy House itself. History of religious materiality has traditionally attracted many art historians, even though recently it has enjoyed the attention of scholars in history as well, such as Caroline Walker Bynum<sup>19</sup> and Alexandra Walsham.<sup>20</sup> Suzanna Ivanic, Mary Laven and Andrew Morrall edited a volume that brought together materiality from across religious confessions in the early modern world in a bid to present a more global discussion on materiality, equally informed by religious as well as politico-economic changes of the period.<sup>21</sup> Understandably, scholars of material culture bring methodologies from their respective disciplines, though these are generally ill-equipped to handle the supernatural. Other scholars choose instead to tackle the supernatural by dismissing it entirely, arguing instead that Catholic miracles were mostly the result of a political agenda. Vélez mentioned Craig Harline's 'Miracles at the Jesus Oak'<sup>22</sup> as one of the examples of this deconstruction of miracles. Harline

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<sup>16</sup> Rubin (2021), 201.

<sup>17</sup> Veléz, Karin, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto, Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Veléz (2021), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Walker Bynum, Caroline, *Christian Materiality, An essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Walsham, Alexandra, *Relics and Remains* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Suzanna Ivanic, Mary Laven & Andrew Morrall eds., *Religious Materiality in the Early Modern World*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Harline, Craig, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak* (Yale: Yale U.P., 2011).

wrote about a miraculous oak tree in the Spanish Netherlands. In his preface, he stated that the model he chose was intended to answer the seemingly simple yet elusive question of 'what the miracles meant to the people of the time'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Vélez argued that Harline's narrative proceeded to show how people made miracles work for them.<sup>24</sup> Harline's model works well with the case studies that the next chapters will present, by giving a more palpable explanation to the modern reader. On the other hand, the main shortcoming of this approach is that it tends to highlight the 'tailoring of a miracle' aspect, the management skills of those who wanted to obtain political gain from a particular shrine without considering the possibility of a sincere religious sentiment that transcended (or accompanied) whatever they gained. In short 'the Jesus oak gets lost beneath human machination'.<sup>25</sup>

A third methodology consists of the complete inverse of the Harline approach, toning down the human role and instead augmenting the supernatural reading of an event. One way of doing this has been to leave miracle accounts unanalysed. As much as it is hard to 'understand a past world on its own terms', and without going into the 'inevitable labouring over whether an event was truly miraculous',<sup>26</sup> leaving the mysterious to be dominant in a particular narrative could have the 'shock potential to outshine every other cause'.<sup>27</sup> A fourth approach follows this third method closely, by further claiming the possibility of the paranormal, or rather a phenomenon that so far cannot be explained by our present scientific knowledge. These could include parapsychological phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, or collective dreaming.<sup>28</sup> Whilst being an avenue that this study will not pursue, the 'paranormal of the sacred'<sup>29</sup> has its merits in claiming that the narrative component surrounding the paranormal adds to the realness, which results in a continued confounding experience of awe and bedazzlement among those who believe. This 'charisma of the improbable'<sup>30</sup> is a very important component in understanding why narratives were given so much importance, why

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Vélez (2021), 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Harline (2011), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Vélez (2021), 19.

<sup>28</sup> Vélez (2021), 20.

<sup>29</sup> Term borrowed from Kripal, Jeffrey, *Authors of the Impossible, the Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: Chicago U.P., 2010); Vélez (2021), 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> Vélez (2021), 21.

sacred spaces endured for so long and why people expected miraculous objects to keep repeating miracles.

A fifth model highlighted by Karin Veléz concerns empathy. This approach attempts to read the ideas of those who claimed to believe in miracles, whilst highlighting the distance between past and present mentalities, at times distancing the reader further from the historical actors and paradoxically obtaining the contrary sentiment to empathy.<sup>31</sup> A sixth and final approach is a synchronic one, or what Veléz called the 'moment' or 'contingency' model, one fixated on pinpointing exact dates for faith-based events. Historians of this method would, once convinced of having established an accurate chronology, build an argument based on its synchronicity. Even though it is useful to consider religious events within the historical context of a fixed moment in time, events or cults that enjoy centuries of devotion also need to be considered in a more diachronic fashion to underscore elements of continuity versus change. In sum, all six methodologies have their merits and could be applied particularly well to one or more of the case studies in this work. Rather than stopping with a deconstruction of Hospitaller religiosity, or even changing methodologies for every chapter, this dissertation will, in the spirit of Rubin and Veléz, devise a way to reconstruct the deconstructed elements.

One such opportunity of reconstructing rather than deconstructing was inspired by the phrase 'universalising the particular and particularising the universal', promoted by Simon Ditchfield as a means of understanding the relationship between the Roman Curia and the Dioceses.<sup>32</sup> 'Universal and Particular' has also had a deep impact on the way we think about the activities of religious orders in a wider world. Ditchfield's argument does not pit core versus periphery but presents a reformation that oscillates between the regional adaptation of universal Roman Catholic cults and liturgies, and the promotion of localised particularities, such as specific rituals, for a worldwide veneration. This, he argues, was best represented by Rome's efforts to staff parishes with a better-trained clergy, as well as ensuring that all

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<sup>31</sup> Veléz (2021), 21-22.

<sup>32</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy, Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), 10.

devotions followed the guidelines set by the Congregation of Rites.<sup>33</sup> Inspired by this, the present thesis is presented into two sections that roughly correspond to Ditchfield's concept of 'particularizing the universal and universalizing the particular', that is, the first three chapters focus on religious practices that did not originate within the Order but were adopted and adapted by the knights in Malta and in their commanderies as a means of implementing and conforming with Tridentine standards (particularizing the universal). The final two chapters deal with attempts by the Hospitallers to take something that was exclusively theirs or was particular to the Order and strive to obtain Roman recognition for it and disseminate it (universalizing the particular). This latter section deals mostly with saints, either Hospitallers or non-members with a strong connection to the Order.

The end of this study coincides with the death of Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar in 1657, delineating what this study is considering a full cycle of 'particularising the universal and universalising the particular'. Before being elected to the magistracy, Lascaris had spent some time living in the *Camerata*,<sup>34</sup> a retreat house for knights who wanted to live their Hospitaller vocation in a more observant manner.<sup>35</sup> Whilst serving as Inquisitor of Malta, the future pope Fabio Chigi, described Lascaris as 'one of the most spiritual'. Chigi's letters to Cardinal Barberini, the Pope's Secretary of State, clearly show that Lascaris was the man that Rome trusted with the spiritual reform of Malta, a reform that would only be enacted in part as a result of tumult in 1639 that threatened to dethrone Lascaris.<sup>36</sup> Even though there were different reasons for the adversity that Lascaris faced in 1639 and that faced by La Cassiere in 1581, these incidents represent two important milestones of the chronology that this work will consider, indicative of a reform in stages that was anything but smooth.

The first two chapters argue that the *Camerata* served as an important centre for spiritual reform, and even though by the time of Lascaris' election it had closed, the choice of a candidate who openly manifested the desire to instil more asceticism and reform the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Borg, Vincent, *Fabio Chigi, Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634-1639), An Edition of his Official Correspondence* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1967), 196.

<sup>35</sup> Borg, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, 'Knights, Jesuits, Carnival and the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Malta', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 2012), 571-596.



novitiate represents an important milestone in the spiritual development of the Order in the seventeenth century.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that this study is proposing a Counter-Reformation process that was concluded by the mid-seventeenth century; rather, the period being studied here represents the first stage in a series of processes that endured to the eighteenth century. For the sake of completeness, the following chapters will consider a more circumspect period in greater detail, as opposed to giving a cursory glance at two centuries of religious history. The approach taken offers nonetheless a methodological outline that could be adapted for later periods as well.

The major events that are discussed in the Chapters, particularly those in Chapters 1, 4, and 5, follow a chronological pattern. Chapter 1 opens with a clamour for reform within the Order and the desire of some knights to invite external help. These knights secluded themselves in a retreat house known as the *Camerata* and were in contact with the great reformer Cardinal Charles Borromeo. The chapter attempts to demonstrate how the Order was guided by a Borromean spiritual language based on penance, good doctrinal education, and frequent acts of piety. The synchronicity of this event is not accidental, as the desire for reform comes around a time of great uncertainty that eventually led to a *coup d'état* against the Grand Master. Documentary sources illustrate the varying degrees of involvement and activity of individual knights in bringing about a reform. Nevertheless, the role of the knights of the *Camerata* towers above the rest. The *Camerata* will also serve as the connector that links the Borromean spirituality of the 1580s with the growing Jesuit influence from the 1590s onwards.

The bridge with Chapter 2 attempts to avoid the pitfalls of a strict 'contingency' approach by moving into the concept of sacrality of the Order's devotional spaces, tracking the legacy of Borromeo's ideas along with that of these few enterprising knights who were the driving force behind most of Valletta's early charitable institutions. This chapter on 'Spaces' allows us to consider slightly different models to blend actual spaces with metaphorical ones, as well as introduce the use of imagery and objects as sources rather than as props to illustrate the

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<sup>37</sup> Borg, 42.

text.<sup>38</sup> The empathetic and phenomenological approaches are further explored in Chapter 3, which attempts to unite spaces and objects through their kineticism, or perceived kineticism. This chapter, dedicated to 'Absent Presences', breaks the chronology slightly, by placing the 'charisma of the improbable' at the centre of the discussion, whilst highlighting at the same time the wider influences such as the Ignatian *compositio loci* or the Sacred Mounts trend, to assess how and why individuals within the Order created localised versions of Golgotha, Loreto, and Montserrat.

Section 2 picks up the chronology again, with the period that corresponds to the years between the canonisation of Carlo Borromeo (1610) and the grand canonisation ceremony of 1622. The reference to canonisations is not casual, as both chapters in this section deal with saints. Chapter 4 takes the case study of the Grotto of St Paul in Rabat (Malta) and considers how Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (r.1601-1622), with the help of some knights and an energetic hermit, managed to circumvent the bishop's authority to obtain suzerainty over this ancient pilgrimage site. The universalising attempts are manifested by means of an important narrative, drawn up by a Maltese galley surgeon, in the hope of influencing a cardinal who was a favourite candidate to accede to the throne of Peter. A final sub-section in this chapter attempts to move beyond the physical space of the Rabat cave, or the fixed chronology, by means of the mythohistory<sup>39</sup> that surrounded stone chippings from the Pauline shrine, called *Terra Sigillata Melitensis*. Artefacts made from this crushed stone were considered to carry the same thaumaturgical power of St Paul, who survived the venom of a viper, and were popular long before the knights set foot on the island. The bridge with the final Chapter is embodied by the knight Fra Francesco Buonarroti, a major exporter of *Terra Sigillata* in the first decades of the seventh century. Fra Buonarroti took the initiative to stamp images of Hospitaller saints and Blessed (*Beati*) on medal-shaped *Terra Sigillata* as a means of exporting more than one cult at a time, that of St Paul and that of a lesser-known Hospitaller saint. The final chapter is dedicated to these Hospitaller saints, or rather to the attempt spearheaded by Grand Master Wignacourt and the Order's official historian Giacomo Bosio (1544-1627), to have these particular saints recognised by the Papacy, and their images printed along with

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<sup>38</sup> Riello, Giorgio, 'Things that shape history. Material culture and historical narratives', *History and Material culture. A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Veléz (2021), 26.

a short hagiography. Fra Francesco Buonarroti, then secretary of the *langue* of Italy, played a prominent role in this group, along with other Tuscan knights, who supplied Giacomo Bosio with information and contacts that benefitted the Hospitaller ‘preservation of the particular.’<sup>40</sup> This rounds off a narrative that departed with the Order in disarray, struggling to define the nature of the Hospitaller vocation, to a point some five decades later when they were comfortable enough to select, from a pool of pious individuals, those who best represented the virtues of a Hospitaller vocation and Catholic sainthood.

The chapters will investigate whether change was brought about by the possibility of having agency, namely in the form of particularising the universal precepts that individuals like Borromeo were advocating for widespread reform. Hospitallers had at their disposal a set of spiritual tools that could assist them when navigating the complexities of their vocation, particularly frequent access to the sacraments, spiritual accompaniment by trained clergy, religious materiality that could help them feel closer to the divine, and spaces that were created (by themselves or others) with this intent in mind. The key research question underlining all this is whether there was a ‘Hospitaller spirituality’ that made them distinct from others, or whether it was more a case of a ‘spirituality of the Hospitallers’ that was an extension of the practices of others.

### ***Historical Context: The Order of St John, the Council of Trent and its aftermath.***

When the Ecumenical Council convened for a third session at Trent (1562), the Council fathers sent for all heads of religious orders to attend, including the Grand Master of the Order of St John. Since there was a growing preoccupation in Malta that an Ottoman invasion was imminent, Grand Master de Vallette chose to send Vice-Chancellor Fra Martin Royas de Portalrubeo (1512-1577) as his representative.<sup>41</sup> The Ottoman invasion materialised three years later, but the threat was substantial enough to put pressure on the Council fathers not only to excuse the Grand Master’s absence but to partially desist from enforcing any concrete

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<sup>40</sup> Ditchfield (1995).

<sup>41</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *Dell’Istoria della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano Parte III* (Roma: Facciotti, 1602), 469.

reform of the Order during such a delicate time. The letter sent by De Vallette, read by Royas to the Council Fathers, listed how the Order had obtained exclusive privileges in recognition for centuries of service to the Church, a service that was pivotal to the safeguarding of the Church's interests. The privilege that the Order coveted most, and sought to protect most through this chosen rhetoric, was the one that exempted them from all secular and religious jurisdictions, placing them directly under Papal authority. It might seem odd at first, that at a Council tasked with responding to the threat of Protestantism, the Order of St John felt the need to emphasise specifically its utility to the Catholic Church vis-a-vis its privileges. If, on the other hand, one considers the circumstances of the third session of the Council and the reasons for summoning the heads of all religious orders to attend, De Vallette was well advised in arguing for the preservation of the Order's privileges. Some Council fathers saw a correlation between the physical encroachment of Protestantism and Islam from without and the spiritual decay that threatened to erode the Church from within. Ultimately, Martin Luther had emerged from among the Augustinians and eventually took as a wife an ex-Cistercian nun, Caterina von Bora, a marriage that represented the threat that lurked within the ranks of the old monastic orders.<sup>42</sup>

The necessity to reform the religious orders in the sixteenth century had already been outlined in a 1513 document presented at the Lateran Council.<sup>43</sup> Titled *Libellus ad Leonem X*,<sup>44</sup> the document was one of the most detailed and severe accusations levied against religious orders, blaming them for having failed to ensure that the laity lived an authentically pious life. On that occasion, the Lateran Council fathers failed to take action on this scathing report, limiting themselves only to denounce the preaching of false teachings. They merely addressed the grave moral and spiritual decadence in some religious institutions through a feeble attempt to strengthen Episcopal control. Catastrophically, in the aftermath of the Lateran Council, the Pope went directly against the *Libellus* by sanctioning the division of the Franciscan Observants from the Conventuals, confirming the inability of the Franciscan order

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<sup>42</sup> Eire, Carlos M., *Reformations, the Early Modern World 1450-1650* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 2016), 213-214.

<sup>43</sup> Fragnito, Gigliola, 'Gli Ordini Religiosi tra Riforma e Controriforma', *Clero e Societa' nell'Italia Moderna*, Mario Rosa (ed.) (Milano: Editori Laterza, 1992), 115.

<sup>44</sup> *Libellus. Addressed to Leo X, Supreme Pontiff by Blessed Paolo Giustiniani & Pietro Querini*, ed. & trans., Stephen M. Beall & John J. Schmitt, (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 2016).

to reform itself internally.<sup>45</sup> The authors of the *Libellus*, and others, also proposed the reduction of religious orders to only those who corresponded to the three main Rules (Augustinian, Franciscan and Benedictine), with a serious re-evaluation of all the Bulls of foundation of the ancient orders.<sup>46</sup>

With five centuries of existence, the Order of St John fell well into this category, and certainly, the years from the loss of Rhodes (1522) to the possession of Malta (1530) could have had a more drastic effect on its existence. Others saw the inadequacy of the old religious orders as an invitation to form new ones, which resulted in the sixteenth century witnessing the birth of several new congregations of clerics regular. Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa, future Pope Paul IV (1555-1559) and one of the founders of the Theatine fathers, commented that *'Being as they are, spread with multitude like the veins in the body of Christendom, they cannot go to ruin without dragging into ruin with them the entire world.'*<sup>47</sup> The Council of Trent attempted to shift some of the responsibilities from the regular clerics to the secular ones, but like its Lateran predecessor, it encountered similar hurdles, one of which being the Papacy itself. The discussion on the dissolution of some of the conventual orders was brought up during the final sessions of Trent, and yet another attempt was made to reduce the privileges that exempted the religious orders from the authority of the bishops.<sup>48</sup> The Pope, on the other hand, was wary of strong episcopal tendencies that could subvert his authority in the dioceses. Furthermore, the centralised structure of the religious orders, coupled with their dependence on the direct authority of the papacy, meant that through the cardinal protectors and procurators of the orders, the Pope's directives could permeate down the hierarchy of the orders to reach even remote convents.<sup>49</sup> As Paulo Paruta remarked in a report to the Venetian Senate (1594): 'What truly makes the Pope's authority great, is that he commands a large number of men in the states of every prince, that is the religious who are directly his

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<sup>45</sup> Fragnito (1992), 116.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 127; 'Essendo come sono in tanta moltitudine diffusi come le vene nel corpo di tutta la Christianita, non possono riunar senza traher seco la riuna del mondo'.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

subjects'.<sup>50</sup> De Vallette's letter<sup>51</sup> indicates that the Order had prior knowledge of these sentiments, indicative of the strength of its network of friends among the ecclesiastical ranks. The same friends, present at the Council, ensured that Trent had little immediate effect on the Order and its privileges.<sup>52</sup>

In hindsight, however, this was not necessarily a good thing for the Hospitallers. Robert Clines remarked that 'if the goal of the Council of Trent was to create a Catholic Church that possessed a uniformity of belief and practice, then the council's decrees were moribund at best upon confirmation; though whether Trent was successful is perhaps beside the point. Rather, given that the ideals and the realities of reform could never be in concert, the more pointed question should be exactly what Catholicism after Trent looked like, not if it was "Tridentine", whatever that term might mean'.<sup>53</sup> In 1563, the reality of Hospitaller reform was a secondary matter, if even on the agenda at all. Had the impending Ottoman incursion been successful, there possibly would not have been an Order of St John to reform. Along with safeguarding the Order's privileges, Royas brought a papal indulgence back to Malta for anyone who helped in the building project of a new city planned for 'Monte St Elmo'; an indulgence issued against the spirit of the Council itself. Nevertheless, the new city project was put on hold as news reached Malta that preparations for an Ottoman invasion were in an advanced state.

It took the knights three arduous months, plenty of casualties, and lots of prayers to finally stop the Ottoman incursion in September 1565. The sense of relief that Malta remained in Hospitaller hands was felt throughout Christendom, famously even the Protestant Elizabeth I

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<sup>50</sup> Fragnito, Gigliola, 'Vescovi e Ordini Religiosi in Italia all'Indomani del Concilio', in *I Tempi del Concilio, Religione, cultura e societa' nell'Europa Tridentina*, Mozzarelli, Zardin (eds.) (Rome: Bulzoni ed. 1997), 19; Alberi, Eugenio, *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori Veneti al senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, Vol. X, Serie II – Tomo IV (Firenze: Societa Editrice Fiorentina, 1857), 2: 'Ma cio che veramente fa grande l'autorita' del pontefice, e che egli comanda a grandissima quantita di uomini negli stati d'ogni principe, cioe di religiosi che sono immediatamente a lui soggetti.'

<sup>51</sup> Bosio III, 459.

<sup>52</sup> Bosio III, 469-470, 737.

<sup>53</sup> Clines, Robert J., 'Review of Celeste McNamara, 'The Bishop's Burden: Reforming the Catholic Church in Early Modern Italy (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America P., 2020)' in *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 8 (2021), 327.

of England ordered bells to be rung in celebration.<sup>54</sup> As soon as the celebrations were over, the knights started to ponder the possibility that the Ottomans might return the following summer. It was paramount that the Order made use of the lessons learnt from the siege of 1565, chief among them, the strategic importance of the Xebb ir-Ras peninsula (also referred to as Monte St Elmo). Thanks to the support they gained in recognition of their victory, the Hospitallers could embark on an ambitious project to transform Malta into a bulwark of resistance to the expanding might of Islam, starting with a new Convent city on the Xebb ir-Ras promontory. This new city was named Valletta, in honour of the Grand Master who had led the defence of the islands, and based on a grid layout, designed by Francesco Laparelli, Pope Pius V's resident military engineer.<sup>55</sup> The decision to build a new fortified city was a commitment that confirms that the Order was truly intending to make Malta their permanent base.

The narrative that is about to unfold in the next pages departs from this victory, more precisely from the building of the new city, since deeper existential questions followed soon after these external threats subsided.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the Ottoman invasion of 1565, and the construction of Valletta the following year, were in themselves part of a more complex sequence of events that shaped the Order's first fifty years on the island. When we think about the Order of St John, and how this institution survived despite being torn by the troubles of the world it inhabited, and its multi-faceted nature, we must also think about how it changed to survive. This was partially made possible by the fact that, in essence, the nature of the Order of St John comprises various elements: war, piety, diplomacy, administration, and philanthropy. Together, these elements compose the body and the soul of the organisation, with the body being the physical presence of the Order in the world, consisting of the violence, the rituals, the material culture, and the political activity; and the soul being the historical, intellectual, and spiritual framework. A Hospitaller vocation presented its

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth was no friend of the knights of Malta, yet she rejoiced at news of the victory in 1565; Vella, Andrew P., *An Elizabethan-Ottoman Conspiracy* (Malta: Royal University of Malta, 1972), 15-16. On Elizabeth and the Knights of Malta, see also: Potter, David, *A Knight of Malta at the Court of Elizabeth I: The Correspondence of Michel de Seure, French Ambassador 1560-1561*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 45 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2014).

<sup>55</sup> On Valletta see, De Giorgio, Roger, *A City by an Order* (Valletta: Progress Press, 1998); Mallia-Milanes, Victor, *Valletta, Malta's Hospitaller City and other essays* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2019); Abdilla Cunningham, Margaret, Camilleri, Maroma and Vella, Godwin (eds.), *Humillima Civitas Vallettae, From Xebb-er-ras to European Capital of Culture* (Malta: Heritage Malta and Malta Libraries, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> See: Russo, 82.

prospective members with a variety of charismas; the medical, priestly, lay-military, administrative, diplomatic, contemplative, or scholarly. Although the Order of St John was not unique, much less the first in Christendom to offer these charismas, it was distinct in allowing its members the possibility of combining two or more of these lifestyles. In one of his many treatises on the privileges and obligations of the Order of St John, Fra Giovanni Maria Caravita, himself a member of the Order, wrote, ‘...with the Militia, [the Order of St John] distinguishes itself from all other monastic orders: with hospitality, it distinguishes itself from all those other military orders’.<sup>57</sup>

As the threat of a second Ottoman invasion subsided, and the building of Valletta progressed, the spiritual and temporal expectations of Trent could no longer be ignored. When Bishop Domenico Cubelles died in 1566, the Grand Master proposed three names for his substitute; the Order’s Conventual Prior Fra Antoine Cressin, his Vice-Prior Jean Pierre Mousquet, both from the langue of France, and the Vice-Chancellor Royas.<sup>58</sup> Being Spanish, the latter was also Philip II’s nominee, but Pope Pius V was reluctant to confirm Royas, leaving the bishopric in *sede vacante* for seven years. It was only with the death of Pius V and the election of Gregory XIII that in 1572 Fra Martin Royas was confirmed Bishop of Malta,<sup>59</sup> a role which, at that point, also comprised the function of a Roman Inquisitor. Royas, who had been personally present at Trent, felt that he was the most suitable candidate to reform Malta along Tridentine standards, which included the reform of the Order of St John.<sup>60</sup> Fra Jean de La Cassiere, elected Grand Master that same year, objected vehemently to what he viewed as an episcopal encroachment on magisterial authority. Just two years later, Royas wrote to the Pope to complain that his officials had been beaten by the Grand Master’s men and that he himself had been threatened with defenestration by La Cassiere if he dared go to the Magisterial Palace.<sup>61</sup> Pope Gregory XIII resolved the matter by sending Mgr Pietro Dusina as Apostolic Visitor with instructions to report on the state of the Church in Malta, the first concrete step

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<sup>57</sup> Caravita, Giovanni, *Trattato della povertà dei Cavalieri di Malta* (Borgonuovo: 1718); Michele Luigi de Palma, *Il Frate Cavaliere; il tipo ideale del Giovannita fra medioevo ed età moderna* (Bari: Ecumenica Edit., 2015), 200.

<sup>58</sup> Russo, 82.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 83; D’Avenia, Fabrizio, ‘The Making of Bishops in Malta of the Knights, 1530-1798’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 66, n.2 (April, 2015), 261-279.

<sup>60</sup> Russo, 84.

<sup>61</sup> Cassar, George, ‘The life of a rural village – Mosta: pastoral visits, the plague and the erection of a new parish (1575-1619)’, *Sacra Militia*, Issue n.12 (2013), 53.



to bring Malta closer to the spirit of Trent. Nevertheless, 'The Council of Trent itself gave little guidance on how to tend to the flock, but this also meant that there was plenty of room for creativity and adaptation. Catholic Reform was whatever it needed to be',<sup>62</sup> as both Royas and Grand Master La Cassiere would soon discover. Royas then proceeded to attempt to extend his episcopal jurisdiction to Valletta and reserve for himself the right to care for the souls of the families of members of the Order and other individuals who gravitated towards the Order. He died in Rome in 1577 while trying to plead his case with the Pope.<sup>63</sup>

Threats of internal schism often arose from intervention and reformatory missions from other religious orders like the Barnabites and Jesuits, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Yet these threats were also, partly, the result of Trent's inefficacy in giving clear directives on how internal reform could take place. Certain problems of spiritual guidance, effective religious education, and moral discipline that were not tackled sufficiently by the Council, surfaced a decade later during La Cassiere's magistracy. The struggle in Hospitaller Malta between Episcopal and Magisterial authority, which continued on and off for the entire duration of the knights' sojourn on the island, reflected the tug-of-war between the Papal and Episcopal authorities for the right to bring about regional reform. Upon La Cassiere's insistence,<sup>64</sup> Gregory XIII revoked the Bishop's Inquisitorial authority. The Grand Master sent his secretary, Fra Cosimo de Luna, to ask the Pope to confer the title upon the Prior of the Conventual Church *pro tempore*,<sup>65</sup> which would have made the Inquisitor *de facto* answerable to the Grand Master. Nevertheless, the tactful Gregory XIII appointed Dusina Inquisitor of Malta,<sup>66</sup> who thus became the third polity on the island, next to the Grand Master and Bishop.

The appointment of a Nuncio-cum-Inquisitor in Malta followed the developments that were taking place in Italy. Gigliola Fragnito argued that Rome was preoccupied by the activism of bishops like Carlo Borromeo who built reform around diocesan authority, and that the Apostolic Visitors were one means of shifting the balance once more towards Rome.<sup>67</sup> Whilst

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<sup>62</sup> Clines, 340.

<sup>63</sup> Russo, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Russo, 85 (footnote, 146).

<sup>65</sup> Russo, 85.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 87; A.A.V., *S.S. Malta*, Vol. 1, f.48r.

<sup>67</sup> Fragnito (1997), 14-15.

this work will deal mostly with what the knights believed and how they worshipped, the underlying power struggles, papal politics and strong individual characters who played important roles in ensuring continuity or bringing about change, cannot be ignored. For instance, upon Royas' death in 1577, Grand Master La Cassiere proposed three candidates for the bishopric. The names of Prior and Vice-Prior Cressin and Mousquet were re-proposed, along with the Catalan Vice-Chancellor Fra Tomas Gargallo. Once again, the Pope opted for the Spanish candidate instead of the Frenchmen, a political choice given how Malta already had a French Grand Master at the helm. La Cassiere clashed with the new bishop almost immediately. Having served as Vice-Chancellor of the Order, Gargallo knew well what the Order's spiritual and temporal limitations were, one of which being that despite being head of all Conventual Chaplains, the Prior of the Conventual Church could not ordain new priests. The bishop, who remained the sole arbiter of who was worthy of priestly ordination, could effectively block any Hospitaller novices from becoming Conventual Chaplains. Like his predecessor, Gargallo had to take his grievances to Rome whilst another mediator, Mgr Ludovico de Torres, was sent to pacify the situation.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately for La Cassiere, his list of personal enemies was growing, as he grew older and, in the eyes of some, weaker. These jurisdictional concerns, remnants of problems that were already evident before and during the Council of Trent, served partly as avenues for individual vendettas, which is why any attempt at painting a complete picture of such events has to invariably consider both the motivations of individual actors and the longer-term, grand scheme of things. On 6 July 1581, Grand Master La Cassiere was deposed by a group of adversaries from within the Order itself, with the war hero Fra Mathurin d'Aix de Lescaut (Romegas) placed Lieutenant in his stead. The ringleaders of the *coup* were some of the highest-ranking members, including Fra Nicola Orsini di Rivalta, Fra Martin Duero Monroy, Fra Louis de Sacquenville, and the Prior of St John's Fra Antoine Cressin.<sup>69</sup> Each of these had individual motivations to turn against the Grand Master, some had personal gripes, others saw an opportunity to further their influence within the Order, and others were impatient to replace him. As Chapter 1 will describe in more detail, the *coup* was not wholly unexpected

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<sup>68</sup> A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* Vol.4176, f. 181r; Russo, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity, The Hospitaller Knights of Malta c.1580-1700* (London: Continuum, 2011), 84; Russo, 92.

by outside observers, most of whom had already noticed a growing discontent amongst a faction of Hospitallers and had complained about the general lack of discipline within their ranks. A small portion of knights were equally dissatisfied with the Grand Master's efforts to reform the Order. Fra Cosimo de Luna, who had served as La Cassiere's secretary during the Royas incident and had advocated Cressin's promotion to Roman Inquisitor, attempted to convince La Cassiere of the need for a deeper spiritual reform along Tridentine standards. Luna was part of a group of knights who were living in a retreat house, commonly known as the *Camerata*. Even if La Cassiere was favourable to Reform, he certainly did not appreciate any individual knights taking the initiative or telling him what to do. Consequently, Luna complained with some powerful friends he had in Rome like Mgr Cesare Spetiano, lieutenant of Carlo Borromeo.<sup>70</sup> When all else failed, he supported the *coup*.<sup>71</sup>

Rome and the papacy proved to be once more an effective arbiter, confirming that Paulo Paruta was right in defining the religious orders as factually papal subjects. La Cassiere and his antagonists were summoned to Rome, where the conspirators were made to apologise publicly to the Grand Master, a short-lived triumph for La Cassiere who did not live long enough to retake his seat in Malta. Less expected is the fate of the conspirators whose careers within the Order went on largely unaffected by their actions. Apart from Romegas, who died heartbroken in Rome days before the Grand Master, all the others kept their posts. Emanuel Buttigieg commented 'In this as in many other instances, personal rank and seniority sheltered the Hospitallers from the consequences of their actions'.<sup>72</sup>

The first half-century of the Order's occupation of Malta (1530-ca.1580) was a continuous balancing act of crises and solutions. Whilst the Order was attempting to redefine its place in a constantly changing world, it had to weather storms from without and within to survive. Its ability to make the best use of what influence and resources it had is perhaps the one feature that emerges constantly from the sources, irrespective of the angle one chooses to study the Order of St John from, be it social, military, economic, or as in this case, religious. On more

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<sup>70</sup> Bibl. Trivulziana, Milano, Triv. 1144, f.68; first published by Vianello, C.A., 'Proposte del 1581 per una riforma dell'Ordine di Malta', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, X (1939), 244-256; Palma, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 184.

<sup>72</sup> Buttigieg (2011), 87.

than one occasion, the Hospitallers even attempted to stretch outside the limits of their capabilities, at times getting away with it, other times being reined in. For an institution accustomed to living in the liminality of fluid parameters, there was nothing uncomfortable with the ambiguities of Tridentine Catholicism. Catholic reform could be anything the Order of St John needed it to be.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Literature Review***

Whilst there is much to say on the sources and historiography of early modern Catholicism,<sup>74</sup> we shall address here the extant literature on the history of the Order of St John, since the themes that will be discussed in the next pages result primarily from the desire to expand our knowledge of the Order and tie it to a wider discussion on religious orders in the early modern period. The review of Hospitaller sources and historiography that follows will present an analysis of the two main factors that condition the way the history of the Order is presented to us: chronological parameters and choice of themes.

Owing to its pluri-centennial history and its itinerant nature, the history of the Order of St John, as well as its specialists, often transpires on the parallel, yet rarely intersecting binaries of 'medieval' and 'early-modern'. As is the case, say for the history of the Franciscans, where internal fractures between the Conventuals and the Observants, and later the Capuchins, form clean chronological departure or cut-off points for historians, similarly for the Hospitallers, the rupture brought about by the loss of their central convent at different points in time, tends to provide an initial chronological grounding. In this sense, a cursory definition of the Order's history would present four main periods: 1060s to 1291 for the Holy Land,<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> cf. Clines, 329.

<sup>74</sup> One of the best overviews on this is provided by Ditchfield, Simon, 'Of Dancing Cardinals and Mestizo Madonnas: Reconfiguring the History of Roman Catholicism in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Early Modern History* 8 (3), (2004), 386-408

<sup>75</sup> See: Riley Smith, Jonathan, *The Knights of St John in Jerusalem and Cyprus 1050-1310* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

ca.1310-1521 for Rhodes, 1530-1798 for Malta and subsequently the fairly unexplored last two centuries of Hospitaller history down to the present day.<sup>76</sup>

Going by this classification, the early modern period for the Order of St John could be taken to begin either in 1522 with the departure from Rhodes or in 1530 with the Order's arrival in Malta. This is loosely influenced by the way Giacomo Bosio himself divided his narrative over three volumes. Yet whilst there is a strong argument that the arrival of the Order ushered in a new period for Malta (as was also the case for fourteenth century Rhodes), as was demonstrated in terms of trade and the economy by Joan Abela,<sup>77</sup> it does not necessarily mean that the Order experienced the same degree of change, at least not immediately. The majority of more recent works have showed a preference for more precise timelines that consider events other than simple arrivals and departures from the Convento as chronological parameters. Valentina Burgassi's work on Hospitaller 'renaissance' architecture argues that the commencement of work on Valletta in 1566 provided the real opportunity for innovation.<sup>78</sup> Emanuel Buttigieg's study on gender and nobility takes 1580 as a point of departure, defining it as a time of 'consolidation and regeneration'.<sup>79</sup> Shifting the attention to the Order's *langues* and presence outside the Convento, the literature has also offered alternative chronologies. Simon Phillips work on the Priors of the English Langue<sup>80</sup> offers the dissolution of the Order in England in 1540 as a cut-off point, whilst Gregory O'Malley's study of the knights of the English Langue between 1460 and 1565, draws the narrative to a conclusion with the siege of Malta.<sup>81</sup>

Choosing to call the Hospitallers 'Knights of Malta' as opposed to the more neutral 'Knights of St John' is already in itself a chronological choice. It implies an element of discontinuity from a period when they were 'Knights of Rhodes' or 'Knights of Jerusalem'. For instance,

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<sup>76</sup> One exception is Sire, Henry J.A., *The Knights of Malta, a Modern Resurrection* (London: Profile Books, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Abela, Joan, *Hospitaller Malta and the Mediterranean Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018).

<sup>78</sup> Burgassi, Valentina, *Il Rinascimento a Malta. Architettura e potere nell'Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme* (Firenze: Olschki, 2022).

<sup>79</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity, The Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c.1580–c.1700* (London: Continuum, 2011), 3.

<sup>80</sup> Phillips, Simon, *The Prior of the Knights Hospitaller in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009).

<sup>81</sup> O'Malley, Gregory, *The Knights Hospitaller of the English Langue 1460–1565* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005).

Henry Sire named his overview history of the Order 'The Knights of Malta',<sup>82</sup> even though his monograph covers the Order's origins and Rhodian phases as well, as does Thomas Freller in his concise history of the 'German Langue of the Order of Malta'.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, David Nicolle emphasised the Jerusalem origin and the Crusades in his overview work that covers from 1110 to 1565, opting end the narrative with the siege of Malta.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, when speaking about the early modern period, the 'Maltese' appellation is not only accurate, but taken directly from the primary sources that often referred to members as *cavaliere di Malta* and the Order as *Religione di Malta* alongside titles such as *Gerosolomitano* or *della Religione di San Giovanni*. Nevertheless, speaking of knights of Malta, invariably excludes the non-knightly ranks of the Order from the equation. Bar some notable exceptions such as Helen Nicholson and Anthony Luttrell's volume on Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages,<sup>85</sup> the chaplains, servants-at-arms, donats and nuns remain relatively understudied, particularly in the early modern period. In most cases the reasons have to do with the difficulty in either finding primary sources or interpreting them, seeing how much less is known about the organisational framework of these other groups in comparison to the knightly ranks.

A growing awareness of the role that the archives have in shaping the historian's understanding, coupled by the fact that the present organisation of the central archive of the Order is not the original one, is helping historians frame better their research within a precise chronology, and better still, ask more pertinent questions on continuity and change across the traditional margins of Holy Land, Rhodes, Malta and beyond. Noteworthy are the efforts of archivists such as Valeria Vanesio,<sup>86</sup> who are mapping out the Order's archives, not only those in the central archives in Malta and Rome, but also the sources scattered in regional, parish and private archives in a bid to give a clearer understanding of how the institution functioned. The organisation and reorganisation of the archives in Malta, as well as the publication of research tools such as catalogues and indices, grouped under 'modern'

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<sup>82</sup> Sire, Henry J.A., *The Knights of Malta* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1994).

<sup>83</sup> Freller, Thomas, *The German Langue of the Order of Malta* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Nicolle, David, *Knights of Jerusalem, the Crusading Order of Hospitallers 1110-1565* (Oxford and New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Luttrell, Anthony and Nicholson, Helen J. (eds.), *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>86</sup> Vanesio, Valeria, 'Il valore inestimabile delle carte. L'Archivio del Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta e la sua storia: un primo esperimento di ricostruzione', *Collectanea Bibliothecae Magistralis*, Stampa II (2014).

classifications, arguably had the biggest impact on the historiography. If we had to consider for instance Ferdinand Hellwald's nineteenth century *Bibliographie methodique de l'Ordre Souverain de St. Jean de Jerusalem*,<sup>87</sup> and the 1924 updated version of the same by Ettore Rossi,<sup>88</sup> the early direction that the historiography would take is very clearly illustrated. Not only is the primary source material, or what was at least known to Hellwald and Rossi, cleanly grouped by the geographical location of the central convent as discussed above, but also subdivided into areas of interest that give precedence to research themes that were predominant in the historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Had there been a present-day equivalent to the *Bibliographie*, which potentially could include research themes such as gender, encounters, material culture and emotional history of the Order, in Hellwald one finds that a great deal of importance was given to the Order's military, diplomatic and ceremonial history, reflecting the historiographical trends of his time.

One could group the main themes in Hospitaller historiography into three main groups: the organisational, history of the singular event or personality, and the cultural history. Although all three coexist even in more recent historiography, the current trend seems to favour the latter, however these categories do not necessarily encapsulate all the works produced, nor is this evaluation implying that the literature produced falls neatly into one of these categories. This grouping and the corresponding evaluation is only meant to instigate the reader to think about certain methodological questions in relation to the extant scholarship, the strengths and weaknesses of each and the presence of Hospitaller studies in wider academia.

The organisational or structural history of the Order consists of all those publications that have focused on one or more of the Order's branches and activities. Part of the fascination with the Order's history stems from the institution's multi-faceted nature; a military order with a medical ethos, a religious order of the Catholic Church and a principality at the same time, frequently an underdog and a small player in the grander Mediterranean eco-system,

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<sup>87</sup> Heller von Hellwald, Ferdinand, *Bibliographie méthodique de l'Ordre souv. de St. Jean de Jérusalem* (Rome: 1885).

<sup>88</sup> Rossi, Ettore, *Aggiunta alla bibliographie méthodique de l'Ordre souverain de St. Jean de Jérusalem di Ferdinand de Hellwald* (Rome: 1924).

yet seemingly omnipresent in all the major happenings. To make sense of this, historians chose to study individual elements of the Order's organisation, such as the Sacra Infermeria<sup>89</sup> or the fleet over a span of time, with the intention of unearthing information on the Order's adaptability and innovation, indirectly placing the onus of the Order's survival on their success (or lack of it) to keep up with an ever-changing world.

To take another example, the Order possessed a large number of landed estates outside the main headquarters (*convento*) known as commanderies. These commanderies, single units of estates, were grouped together in Priors or bailiwicks, and in turn a number of Priors in close geographical proximity formed a *langue*, with eight *langues* in total.<sup>90</sup> It was always clear to historians of the Order of St John that these properties were essential as a means of financial income and recruitment, and were often the subject of diplomatic missions.<sup>91</sup> The centrality of the commandery system to the Order's administration was already highlighted in the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* of 1113, the Papal Bull which sanctioned the establishment of the Order, and it is not surprising that a study of the Order's properties attracted innumerable scholarly attention. Initial works had to identify the number of properties that the Order possessed at any one time and more concretely, the manner through which the Order gathered funds from these lands, some of which were as far away from Malta as Poland,<sup>92</sup> Denmark<sup>93</sup> or the Caribbean.<sup>94</sup> Alongside the technical aspects of obtaining a commandery, choosing a commander, making improvements and collecting funds, for some of the more

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<sup>89</sup>For instance: Grima, Joseph F., *The Fleet of the Knights of Malta; Its Organisation during the Eighteenth Century* (Malta: BDL, 2016), which is an exhaustive study on the fleet of the Order that compliments an earlier work by Quintano, Anton, *The Maltese-Hospitaller Sailing Ship Squadron 1701-1798* (Malta: PEG, 2003); Muscat, Joseph, Cuschieri, Andrew, *The Naval Activities of the Knights of St John 1530-1798* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2002).

<sup>90</sup> Provence, France, Auvergne, Castille, Leon and Portugal, Aragon, Catalunya and Navarre, Italy, Germany and England (later Anglo-Bavaria).

<sup>91</sup> Mallia-Milanes, Victor, *In the Service of the Venetian Republic; Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga's Letters from Malta to Venice's Magistracy of Trade 1754-1776* (Malta: PEG, 2008); Mallia-Milanes, Victor, *Venice and Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship* (Malta: PEG, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> *The Order of St John and their ties with Polish territories* (Poland: Ministry of Culture and Natural Heritage, 2014); Szczesniak, Boleslaw, "The Medieval Knights of St. John of Jerusalem in Poland", *Slavic and East-European Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1959), 22-41.

<sup>93</sup> Commanderies in the Grand Priory of Dacia (Denmark) included Antvorskov, Odense, Schleswig, Viborg

<sup>94</sup> Freller, Thomas and Zammit, William, *Knight Buccaneers, and Sugar Cane: The Caribbean Colonies Of The Order Of Malta*, (Malta: Midsea, 2015).



important units, the historiography considers a micro-analysis of individual commanderies,<sup>95</sup> or at times concurrently by taking one or more commanderies in a priory or a region.<sup>96</sup>

Another popular approach to Hospitaller studies centres around histories of individual members or events. This considers the impact of an event or a person over a more limited timespan. Biographical works are still very popular in Hospitaller historiography and generally focus on Grand Masters or high-ranking individuals who are valued for their singular contribution to the institution's history.<sup>97</sup> Although most recent works refrain from saying explicitly that the role of the single individual being studied was a determining factor in history, the impression that is given is that certain biographies provide an outline for our understanding of the whole organisation. This is especially the case when individual anecdotes are chosen for their controversial or transgressional nature, which albeit entertaining and real, often result in a disproportionate impression of the whole group if left unanalysed.<sup>98</sup> It does not mean that there is no place in future Hospitaller historiography for semi-biographical works, particularly for an institution whose members were anything but plain, however the challenge with such approach is being able to present these people as complex players in an equally intricate surrounding. One example that stands out for the expert use of sources that are in themselves difficult to interpret, is Gabriele Zaccagnini's monograph on St Ubaldesca.<sup>99</sup> Zaccagni demonstrated an expert use of hagiographies as tools for writing not just a biography of St Ubaldesca but a history of her cult. Also worthy of

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<sup>95</sup> See for instance: Sebregondi, Ludovica, *San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini a Firenze* (Firenze: Edifir, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Castellarin, Benvenuto, *Ospedali e Commende del Sovrano Militare Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme, di Rodi, di Malta a Volta di Ronchis e in Friuli* (Udine: Edizioni la bassa, 1998); Ricardi di Netro, Tommaso and Gentile Luisa (eds.), *"Gentilhuomini Christiani e Religiosi Cavalieri" nove secoli dell'Ordine di Malta in Piemonte* (Milano: Electa, 2000); Delle Piane, Gian Marino, *San Giovanni di Prè commenda dell'Ordine di San Giovanni di Gerusalemme, di Rodi e di Malta in Genova* (Alessandria: Gran Priorato di Lombardia e Venezia, 1973); Ricciardi, Emilio, *Nelle terre dei Cavalieri. Il mezzogiorno d'Italia nella cartografia dell'Ordine di Malta* (Arriccina: Aracne ed., 2011); Salerno, Maria Rosaria, *L'Ordine di Malta in Calabria e la commenda di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano di Cosenza (sec. XII-XVI)* (Cosenza: Luigi Pellegrini ed., 2010); Anabasi, Giulia and Martini Simone, *Il Tempio di Pistoia, Lo Spedale, La Chiesa e La Magione di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano dal XI al XXI secolo* (Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2018); Alvarado Planas, Javier and de Salazar Acha, Jaime (eds.), *La Orden de Malta en España (1113-2013)* (2 vols.) (Madrid: Sanz y Torres, 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Examples include; Testa, Carmel, *Romegas* (Malta: Midsea, 2002); Testa, Carmel, *The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto, 1741-1773* (Malta: Midsea, 1989).

<sup>98</sup> See for instance: Engel, Claire Elaine, *Knights of Malta, a Gallery of Portraits* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963); Bonello, Giovanni, *Histories of Malta* [series of 12 volumes] (Malta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2000-2012).

<sup>99</sup> Zaccagnini, Gabriele, *Ubaldesca, una santa laica nella Pisa dei secoli XII-XIII* (Pisa: Gisem Edizioni, 1995).

mention is a small but detailed study by Chiara Cecalupo<sup>100</sup> on the contribution of Fra Giovanni Francesco Abela, Vice-Chancellor of the Order, in the field of Christian archaeology. Rather than give a full biography of Abela, whose work as Vice-Chancellor merits more attention by scholars, Cecalupo opted to focus on Abela's archaeological collection, inspired no less by his years in Bologna in the shadow of Aldrovandi and his friendship with Antonio Bosio, featuring the Oratorian and Jesuit milieus in the background. The connections with names such as Chigi, Barberini, Holstenius, Kircher and others help to situate Abela and his connections in a wider Catholic intellectual dimension.

Alternatively, some other publications simply limit themselves to providing a transcription of the sources with a commentary, bringing the individual to the attention of the scholarly community, which when done right, is nonetheless a valuable resource.<sup>101</sup>

The stereotype of the debauched knight typical in eighteenth century literature such as Patrick Brydone's<sup>102</sup> and the enigmatic Carasi<sup>103</sup> is still attractive to many historians and readers. Whilst there is no doubt that a considerable number of knights were far from models of exemplary living, the stress over deeds and misdeeds of these single individuals are more often than not of little consequence on a macro level. Works that, for instance, take into consideration both the transgressions as well as the penal system, provide a much more complete picture of what it truly meant to transgress.<sup>104</sup> Consciously or not, the narrative of a once glorious religious order in decline, that by the eighteenth century had become but a shadow of its past, is partly to blame for the general lack of interest in the devotional-religious life of the Hospitallers. And whilst it is true that by 1798 the Order's hold over Malta had

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<sup>100</sup> Cecalupo, Chiara, *Giovanni Francesco Abela, work, private collection and birth of Christian archaeology in Malta* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020).

<sup>101</sup> Potter, David (ed.), *A Knight of Malta in the Court of Elizabeth I: The correspondence of Michel de Seure, French Ambassador, 1560-61* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2014); Scarabelli, Giovanni, *Culto e Devozione dei Cavalieri a Malta* (Malta: Malta University Press, 2004).

<sup>102</sup> In 1770, the staunch Protestant visiting Malta commented: 'There were about thirty Knights in each galley, making signals all the way to their mistresses who were weeping for their departure upon the bastions, for they pay almost as little regard to their vows of chastity as the priests and confessors do.': op.cit. Cavaliero, Roderick, *The Last of the Crusaders* (London: Turis, 2009), 19.

<sup>103</sup> Freller, Thomas, *Carasi, the Order of Malta Exposed* (Malta: the author, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> See; Zammit, William, *Kissing the Gallows : A Cultural History of Crime, Torture and Punishment in Malta, 1600-1798* (Malta: BDL, 2016); Ciappara, Frans, *Society and the Inquisition in Early Modern Malta* (Malta: PEG, 2001); Cassar, Carmel, 'The Inquisition Index of Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St John', *Melita Historica*, no.2 (1993), 157-196.

become untenable, and that the Enlightenment had made inroads in Malta as much as the French Revolution deprived the Order of some of its most lucrative properties, it is not at all true that the Order or by extension Hospitaller Malta, experienced a general decline in faith and devotionality. Quite the contrary, Frans Ciappara<sup>105</sup> argued that Malta, like Spain, experienced a Catholic Enlightenment, characterised by efforts for an improved education of the clergy and greater promotion of the spiritual well-being of the faithful, encouraged no less by the involvement of the Grand Masters in parish life and their membership in confraternities. In essence, and as the following pages will discuss, devotionality and debauchery were not only equally consistent throughout the Order's existence, but were at times almost interdependent, since sinfulness mandated atonement.

The historian interested in the spiritual and devotional aspects of daily life could be tempted to produce a work dedicated to the more pious individuals in an effort to provide a more balanced narrative, however, this approach could just as easily become a modern-day hagiography with a revisionist tone. Choosing pious individuals as a counterbalance for the transgressive ones still entails a selective reading of the sources, one that groups people into 'essentially good' or 'essentially bad'.

Several works opted to study individual events rather than individual biographies. Most of these publications deal with military historical events, and for the early-modern period no event enjoyed as much attention as the 'Great Siege' of 1565.<sup>106</sup> The centrality of 1565 in the Hospitaller narrative is not something that historians came up with; the Order itself already in the months following the event, made the siege an integral part of its branding. The unexpected victory provided the Order with the opportunity to place itself on the 'wall of fame' of European military history. It was not the first time that the Order won against all odds, one could compare 1565 to the siege of Rhodes in 1480, which has also attracted attention. As with biographical works, there is a menace predominantly in military history that individual events, battles, be taken out of context and analysed almost minute by minute. Volumes that publish a collection of essays, each of which analyse an event such as the siege,

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<sup>105</sup> Ciappara, Frans, 'The Maltese Catholic Enlightenment', in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, U.L. Lehner and M. Printy (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 251-295.

<sup>106</sup> Camilleri, Maroma (ed.), *Besieged: Malta 1565* [2 vols] (Malta: Malta Libraries and Heritage Malta, 2015).

from a different point-of-view, have proven the ability to use synchronic events to generate larger debates, even if within a relatively restricted group of specialists.<sup>107</sup>

More importantly however, collections of essays grouped together by event or by a common theme, have had the effect of offering a multi-disciplinary approach,<sup>108</sup> one that included also the input of archaeologists, art and literary historians amongst others. Noteworthy is the Routledge Military Orders series,<sup>109</sup> which has produced seven volumes (the eighth forthcoming) of collaboration between specialists in military orders, Hospitallers or otherwise, in both medieval and the early modern period. Another excellent example along the same lines, on a theme closer to the period being studied here, is the volume edited by Mol, Miltzer and Nicholson on the *Military Orders and the Reformation*. David Allen's contribution in this volume on 'Lascaris and the Catholic Reformation' offered many interesting avenues for further investigation, some of which were taken up in the next chapters. In many ways, the present work embraced the lessons that a multi-disciplinary approach offers and where possible, uses material or visual evidence in the same way an art historian<sup>110</sup> or an archaeologist might.

Where Hospitaller spirituality and devotion is concerned, there are few works that relate to the theme. Luigi Michele da Palma's *'Il Frate Cavaliere'*<sup>111</sup> and to a certain extent the introductory part in Giovanni Scarabelli's *'Culto e Devozione dei Cavalieri a Malta'*<sup>112</sup> are the only works whose topic of research are comparable to what this present research set out to accomplish. Scarabelli's work deals mostly with liturgical practices and the majority of the volume is in fact a reproduction of parts of the Archive of the Order in Valletta that details the Order's liturgical practices. Da Palma on the other hand wanted to investigate whether

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<sup>107</sup> Brockman, Eric, *The Two Sieges of Rhodes 1480-1522* (London: John Murray, 1969).

<sup>108</sup> For instance: Buttigieg Emanuel and Phillips Simon (eds.), *Islands and Military Orders, c.1291–c.1798* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Abdilla Cunningham Margaret, Camilleri, Maroma and Vella Godwin (eds.) *Humillima Civitas Vallettae, from Mount Xebb-er-ras to European Capital of Culture* (Malta: Heritage Malta and Malta Libraries, 2018).

<sup>109</sup> *The Military Orders* [7 vols.] (London and New York: Routledge, 1994-2019).

<sup>110</sup> See as an example: Buhagiar, Mario, *Essays on the Knights and Art and Architecture in Malta 1500-1798* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2009); Vella, Theresa, *Splendour and Devotion: The Art Collections of the Order of St John* (Malta: Kite, 2023).

<sup>111</sup> Da Palma, Luigi Michele, *Il Frate Cavaliere, il tipo ideale del Giovannita fra medioevo ed età moderna* (Bari: Ecumenica Ed., 2015).

<sup>112</sup> Scarabelli (2004).

there was such a thing as an ideal knight from a moral point of view, with his focus being the extant instruction manuals for knights, chaplains and novices. Alongside these, the work of Francesco Russo<sup>113</sup> on the jurisdictional relationship between the Order and the Diocese of Malta in the early modern period, provided a lot of research that informed the reading of certain primary sources, particularly those that were concerned with the reform of the Order. One could mention a list of monographs or papers that have looked at various aspects of the daily lives of knights, the way they thought, behaved, what they held dear<sup>114</sup> and the wider questions on their vocation, yet this work owes a lot specifically to a study published in 2011 by Emanuel Buttigieg entitled *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity; the Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c.1580-c.1700*.<sup>115</sup> Buttigieg's dense analysis of what being a Hospitaller in early modern Europe truly meant is made clear to the reader without doing away with the intricacies and contradictions that will invariably emerge when you group together the concepts of gender, vocation and social standing. Buttigieg looked at factors that are both present within the Hospitaller sphere as well as in a wider European scenario, constantly shifting from the wider perspective to the particular case studies involving individual members or events, as well as seeing how these three distinct elements were interdependent. This effective rendition of the Order of St John, both as a product of its time, as well as an anomaly, is reflected also in individual members who do not cease to be representatives of their families and place of origin when they join the Order, yet at the same time become functionaries of the Order-State, whose actions contribute directly to the prosperity or misfortune of the institution. This multilateral approach has proven successful not only as a contribution to the cultural history of the Order of St John, but also as a means of envisaging the role of Hospitaller historiography in a wider Mediterranean and European scholarship.

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<sup>113</sup> Russo, Francesco, *Un Ordine, Una Città, una Diocesi, La giurisdizione ecclesiastica nel principato monastico di Malta in età moderna (1523-1722)* (Canterano: Aracne, 2017).

<sup>114</sup> For an example of such a publication dealing with the eighteenth century, see: Depasquale, Carmen, *La Vie intellectuelle et culturelle des chevaliers français à Malte au XVIIIe siècle* (Malta: University of Malta P. 2010).

<sup>115</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity: The Hospitaller Knights of Malta, c.1580-c.1700* (London: Continuum, 2011).



## Part 1

### Chapter 1: Renewal

*“Penance was the master key of Borromeoan Spirituality”*<sup>116</sup>

From the early seventeenth century onwards, each year on 4 November, a great feast took place in St John’s Conventual Church in honour of a key saint of the post-Tridentine Reformation, St Carlo Borromeo. The Cardinal-Bishop of Milan was declared a saint in 1610, skipping the intermediary step of blessed.<sup>117</sup> In 1614 the knights erected an altar dedicated to him in St John’s, next to the Oratory’s entrance.<sup>118</sup> A decade later, Fra Pietro Urrea Camarasa, then serving as the Prior of the Conventual Church, at his own expense, elevated the feast day ritual to a pontifical one,<sup>119</sup> the highest level of ceremonial possible. It is clear just by looking at the multitude of churches and altars dedicated to him, that the cult of St Carlo spread rapidly in many dioceses,<sup>120</sup> and soon enough Borromeo became one of those tireless exponents of Tridentinism who seems to be a ubiquitous presence in Catholic devotional life.<sup>121</sup> In this respect, Hospitaller Malta was no exception.<sup>122</sup> A late sixteenth-century plan of the Jesuit College in Valletta, with annotations added sometime between

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<sup>116</sup> De Boer, Wietse, *The Conquest of the Soul, Confession, Discipline and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001), 79.

<sup>117</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, ‘Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism as a World Religion’, *Carlo Borromeo e il Cattolicesimo dell’età moderna*, Frosio, Zardin (eds.), Biblioteca Ambrosiana – Studia Borromaica/25 (Milano: Bulzoni ed., 2011), 6.

<sup>118</sup>This altar was later demolished and the dedication to St Charles was transferred to the chapel of relics of the Anglo-Bavarian langue; N.L.M., MS. 271, 129; Sciberras, Keith, ‘Caravaggio, the Confraternita della Misericordia and the original context of the Oratory of the Decollato in Valletta’, *The Burlington Magazine*, CXLIX (November, 2007), 761.

<sup>119</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235, f.98; from a duplex minor to a pontifical one.

<sup>120</sup> Devotion towards the saint in Malta is also evident when analysing the early dedications in the Diocese as well. Although the first appearance of the cult of Borromeo seems to be that in St John’s, the Diocese soon followed with an altar in St Paul’s oratory in Valletta (1616), an altar and a lay confraternity in Senglea (1620), and co-titular representation with the Nativity of Our Lady in Safi (1630) and with Our Lady of Graces in Zebbug (1637); Borg, Vincent, *Melita Sacra – The Maltese Diocese During the Seventeenth Century*, Vol III, Part II (Malta: 2015), 949.

<sup>121</sup> Ditchfield gives ample reasons for this in ‘Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism as a World Religion’.

<sup>122</sup> On artistic representations of St Charles in Malta see: Attard, Christian, ‘Carlo’s Passion, The Iconography and Cult of S. Carlo Borromeo in Malta’, *Treasures of Malta* 51, Summer 2011 (Malta, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju), 19-27.

1610 and 1622, shows the invocation of only three of the nine projected altars.<sup>123</sup> One is dedicated to Ignatius Loyola, not yet canonised (Beato Padre Ignazio), another is dedicated to Our Lady of Montserrat, and a third to S. Carlo Borromeo. (Fig. 1)



Figure 1: Collège de La Valette, autre plan du rez-de-chaussée de P. Tommaso Blandino – P. Giuseppe Valeriano (1595), [detail] Bibliothèque nationale de France.

On the other hand, since the earliest stages of the present research into the Hospitaller understanding of piety, it became apparent that the link between Borromeo and the knights stretched beyond a mere adherence to the Roman Ritual when celebrating his feast, or the recurrent, artistic representations and dedications. These links, fragments scattered here and there, at least initially, did not constitute any particular innovation to the theme of Hospitaller devotional patterns. Borromeo appeared everywhere, from sermons to souvenirs, from paintings to prayer spaces, and will appear from time to time throughout the following chapters. Eventually, however, it became clear that the seemingly scattered presence was indicative of a much stronger undertone set by Carlo Borromeo during his lifetime, resonating through the popularity of his cult as a saint after his death. Gradually, these fragments

<sup>123</sup> On the architecture of the Jesuit College, see: Thake, Conrad 'The University of Malta : an architectural appraisal from inception to the present' in K. Sciberras, E. Buttigieg, M. A. Falzon, D. Fenech, G. M. Martin (Eds.), *The University of Malta : legacies and bearings* (Malta: Malta University Press, 2020) 118-153.



became indicative of a larger picture, one that proves beyond doubt that the Cardinal-Bishop was largely responsible for setting the pace of Hospitaller spiritual reform, the particularising of the universal, in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. A set of unpublished letters exchanged between the Cardinal, already a leading figure of the Counter-Reformation, and a small group of knights, shed light on a very delicate moment in the history of the Order, a period of both institutional and spiritual reconstruction in the first years of the new city, Valletta.

These letters give voice to knights who resided in a retreat house known as the Camerata, built during the first years of Valletta. This chapter will analyse whether these knights were the main instigators of a refashioned spirituality, at a time when the Order of St John had only a devotional pattern to rely on but no clear spiritual pathway. Their contribution entailed, first and foremost, the choice of which spiritual framework to follow, taking into consideration that the path chosen was not the only one available. The presence of many Milanese knights among the Camerati, the members forming this group, resulted in them seeking the direct intervention of Carlo Borromeo who occupied the Bishopric of Milan. The continuous pleas for assistance by some knights, such as Fra Categliano Casati, serve to disprove any arguments of a top-down Tridentinism, rather than displaying the negotiated aspects of this process. The effects of this assistance may be observed through the main hallmarks of Borromeian spirituality, namely penance and discipline, generally achieved through frequent reception of the sacraments and regulation of charitable institutions. Through these letters, I will argue that from the 1580s onwards, with the assistance of other religious orders such as the Barnabites and the Jesuits, the knights of the Camerata were actively involved in changing the spiritual landscape of Valletta by echoing the Tridentine interpretation and activities of Borromeo in his diocese of Milan.

## ***Carlo Borromeo and the redefinition of Catholicism***

Attributing the global dimension of Catholicism to the influence of Carlo Borromeo is an idea that Simon Ditchfield proposed to highlight how important the cardinal-saint from Milan was in faraway places such as Mexico and Peru.<sup>124</sup> His influence over the very manner Catholicism presented itself, from seemingly small contributions like the promotion of the confession box<sup>125</sup> to topics such as Episcopal Synodality and Diocesan archival practices, were not always immediately apparent to historians. Hospitaller Malta is, of course, physically much closer to Milan than South America, and therefore it should not be surprising to discover that he played a role in Malta's spiritual development as well. All the more so seeing how it was Cardinal Borromeo himself who wanted to be involved in the spiritual growth of the Order, not only because he was the Cardinal-Protector of the knights, a semi-official role that meant that he would intervene on their behalf with the Papacy,<sup>126</sup> but also because he believed that the fate of the Order in Malta could have a wider effect on the fate of Catholicism in Southern Europe. This is particularly evident from one of the first sermons he delivered in the Duomo in Milan as their new bishop in August 1565.<sup>127</sup> On that occasion, he called for a general act of penance throughout his Diocese to assist with spiritual weapons in the defence of Malta. These spiritual means consisted of the three pillars of what will become in essence Borromean Tridentinism: confession, communion, and communal prayer.<sup>128</sup> According to Borromeo, the fate of Malta depended on a collective responsibility for the sins of Christendom, since the Turks could never win unless God allowed them to punish the sins of those times, including the excesses of his own congregation.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, 'Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism as a World Religion', Carlo Borromeo e il Cattolicesimo dell'età moderna, Frosio, Zardin (eds.), Biblioteca Ambrosiana – Studia Borromaica/25 (Milano: Bulzoni ed., 2011), 3-23.

<sup>125</sup> Rusconi, Roberto, 'The Sacrament of Penance at the Council' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Council of Trent*, Nelson Minnich (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2023), 139-155.

<sup>126</sup> Russo, Francesco, 'The Cardinal Protector of the Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 115 (2020/3-4), 553-580.

<sup>127</sup> A copy of this sermon survives in the B[ibliotheca] A[m]brosiana di] M[ilano], D 168 INF., unità 14, ff.70r-75v.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, f.70 v; On Borromeo and the sacrament of confession, see: Bossy, John, 'The social history of Confession in the Age of Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 25 (1975), 21-38.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, f.71r: 'Noi habbiamo aggrandito il Turco, per noi è potente, per noi vittorioso, per noi tremendo et formidabile, et se noi havessimo paura di peccare, et di provocar l'ira di Dio, non haveremmo paura di lui, nè di suoi armati... Ecco hora I Turchi ce lo mostrano chiaramente, che sono verga di Dio; non sono essi che ci percuotono, no: è Dio medesimo.'

Writing about Catalonia in the same period, Henry Kamen further stated that “the beginning of the active phase of the Counter-Reformation in the Mediterranean can be fixed precisely



Figure 2: *S. Carlo in Processione con il Santo Chiodo*, Fede Galizia's (1610), Museo del Duomo - Milano

at 1565, when Carlo Borromeo arrived in his[arch]diocese of Milan”,<sup>130</sup> a statement that can be analysed in the context of the Maltese reality as well.

The very same approach made Borromeo world famous when, during the terrible plague that hit Milan in 1576 (the plague of S. Carlo), the bishop led his congregation in procession, barefoot, with a noose around his neck and a black veil over his head, as a general act of penance for the liberation of the city from the pestilence (*Fig.2*).<sup>131</sup> Borromeo carried a processional cross with the relic of the *Santo Chiodo*, a symbol of Christ’s suffering for the sins of humanity, as a reminder of the suffering servant whose blood washed away the sins of all those still to come. Pamela Stewart defined the plague procession of 1576 as the making of the ‘*Citta Rituale*’, meaning a form of spirituality that is woven into the very topography of the city.<sup>132</sup>

Wietse de Boer wrote that the ‘Borromean experiment’ merits study not only because its measures affected the widest possible entities, clergy and laity, men and women, workspace and devotional space, but also for its thorough documentation. The completeness of the Milanese records, which no doubt stem from Borromeo’s personal obsession with good archival practices, provide a complete picture both in terms of the historical conditions and underlying motivations, to the use of penance as an episcopal tool, as well as the successes, failures and obstacles that the various initiatives encountered along the way. ‘The wider significance of the Borromean project is nevertheless unquestionable... the consistency, detail and force of the Borromean model of discipline conferred it a lasting and almost unparalleled influence throughout the Catholic world.’<sup>133</sup> Borromean Tridentinism was therefore primarily interested in addressing the internal problems of the Catholic Church,

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<sup>130</sup> Kamen, Henry, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter-Reformation* (London, New Haven: Yale U.P., 1993), 42; op. cit. Ditchfield, ‘Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism’, 10.

<sup>131</sup> This soon became an integral part of Borromeo’s iconography, reproduced by Fede Galizia’s 1610 painting of the saint (Veneranda Fabrica del Duomo, Milan) and in the corresponding episode in the *Quadroni di S. Carlo* by the Fiammenghino, hung every year in the Duomo on the saint’s feast.

<sup>132</sup> Stewart, Pamela, ‘Staging the Passion in the Ritual City: Stational Crosses and Confraternal Spectacle in Late Renaissance Milan’, *Space, Place, and Motion, Locating Confraternities in the Late Medieval and Early Modern City*, Bullen Presciutti, Diana (ed.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 217-8. The term ‘*Citta Rituale*’ was previously used for Borromean Milan by Mazzotta Buratti, Adele, *La citta rituale: La citta e lo Stato di Milano nell’eta dei Borromeo* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1982); and for early modern Rome by Visceglia, Maria Antonietta, *La città rituale: Roma e le sue cerimonie in età moderna* (Roma: Viella, 2002).

<sup>133</sup> De Boer (2001), x.

before addressing the wider challenge posed by Protestantism.<sup>134</sup> He was not the only exponent of the period to aspire to an internal reform, but whereas others such as Philip Neri, Ignatius Loyola, and Therese of Avila relied mostly on charisma, Borromeo was uniquely placed within the Church hierarchy to bring about change by means of his own authority.<sup>135</sup>

The full-scale effort to reach into the consciousness of the subjects in the Diocese of Milan had the overarching objective of sanctifying everyday life. In this regard, Milan became the foremost laboratory of Counter-Reformation spirituality, even though Borromeo's contribution lasted only because it was followed up by his successors as bishops, Gaspare Visconti (1584-95) and Federico Borromeo (1595-1631). The Milanese effort was by no means an isolated one, urged by the post-Tridentine need for social order, discipline and loyalty in a society fragmented by disagreement and religious strife. Despite the many other instances of similar experiments carried out in other dioceses, Carlo Borromeo's method immediately stood out for its consistency, comprehensiveness, and rigour.<sup>136</sup>

In concrete terms, Borromeo's penitential reform focused on avoiding occasions of sin and partaking instead in virtuous activities. Though as early as the 1565 Siege of Malta sermon, one can already find the seeds of Borromeo's penitential plan, his programme in Milan truly took shape in the years 1573-74, with the seminal instructions to confessors highlighting the role of penance as a conversion experience.<sup>137</sup> The Roman Catechism of 1566, composed under Borromeo's supervision, reinforced the importance of the sacrament of confession by defining it as the 'fortress of Christian virtue'.<sup>138</sup> Most historians of early modern Catholicism chose to attribute the strengthening of the sacrament of confession to the Jesuits, somewhat downplaying the role of post-Tridentine bishops as innovators of the sacrament. Furthermore, works such as Ronnie Po-chia Hsia's *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*<sup>139</sup> succinctly link this renewal with the Jesuits, since the chronology itself coincides

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<sup>134</sup> Fox, Charles, 'Philip Neri and Carlo Borromeo as models of Catholic reform', *Perichoresis*, Vol. 18.6 (2020), 120.

<sup>135</sup> Fox (2020), 121.

<sup>136</sup> De Boer (2001), ix.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> See: Sluhovsky, Moshe, 'General Confession and Self-Knowledge in Early Modern Europe', in *Knowledge and Religion in Early Modern Europe, Essays in Honour of Michael Heyd* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 25-48.

<sup>139</sup> Po-chia Hsia, Ronnie, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1998).

directly with the period from the Jesuit foundation to their suppression.<sup>140</sup> Without detracting anything from the Jesuit contribution, Ditchfield and de Boer challenged the idea that the Society of Jesus were the most determined and efficient agent of Tridentine reforms of confession. In the case of Malta, the Jesuit contribution, albeit substantial, also seems to have come after an earlier Borromean model. The Borromean-Barnabite mission to Malta in the early 1580s will furthermore sustain assertions such as those of Karen Melvin that missions were, first and foremost, an integral part of the Catholic programme within Europe, meant to create conformity among Catholics, and not solely targeting new territories.<sup>141</sup>

Aside from the elements of continuity between Borromean and Jesuit influences, some other key differences are worthy of comment. For instance, whilst historians of the Jesuit method put forward the idea of the privatisation of religious life, the Borromean Tridentine model shows a strong pull in the other direction.<sup>142</sup> De Boer argued that Borromeo employed his 'army of confessors' to have a much deeper reach into the public conscience than what the Jesuits or even the Roman Inquisition were able to achieve in the same period.<sup>143</sup> That said, Borromeo did borrow some aspects from Ignatian spirituality, chief among them the concept of frequent self-examination.<sup>144</sup> The hagiographies of St Carlo give equal prominence to two vocational orientations; his contribution to the role of the episcopacy, immediately highlighted by Padre Francesco Panigarola in Carlo's funerary oration,<sup>145</sup> and his pastoral work, which was also followed up by the Jesuits and exalted by Cardinal Bellarmino on the eve of Carlo's canonisation. Bellarmino furthermore pointed out why he thought Borromeo deserved to be canonised, namely for being an embodiment of four important principles of Christian doctrine: love of God, love of one's neighbour, contempt for the world (mundanity), and contempt for himself (penance).<sup>146</sup> Although the Order's members rarely distinguished

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<sup>140</sup> Ditchfield, 'Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism...', 3.

<sup>141</sup> Melvin, Karen, *Building Colonial Cities of God: Mendicant Orders and Urban Culture in New Spain* (California: Stanford U.P., 2012).

<sup>142</sup> De Boer (2001), 325.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>145</sup> See: Ardissino, Erminia, 'Predicare per san Carlo a Milano e dintorni', in *Norma del Clero, Speranza del Gregge, l'opera riformatrice di San Carlo tra centro e periferia della Diocesi di Milano*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, (Milano: Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> Alzati, Cesare, 'La Santità di S. Carlo nello specchio della Liturgia in Carlo Borromeo e il Cattolicesimo dell'età moderna', *Carlo Borromeo e il Cattolicesimo dell'età moderna*, Frosio, Zardin (eds.), Biblioteca Ambrosiana – Studia Borromaica/25 (Milano: Bulzoni ed., 2011), 136.

themselves for their contempt of worldly gifts, Fra Jaime Zummo (1573-1642), a knight from Palermo, had this to say to a group of nuns for whom he acted a spiritual director:

‘[the Lord] made you feel the fasting and penance, that he requested from you; which were not intended to scar the flesh, but to annihilate the passions, and remove the affects, that the accursed self-love tends to produce...I want that each one of you examines herself for the progress you’ve done...’<sup>147</sup>

Irrespective of his episcopal/cardinal role, Borromeo’s disdain for the world, despite distinguished ancestry, made him a veritable model of sainthood for members of the Order of Malta as well. In the early days after his canonisation, thanks to the efforts of his cousin Cardinal Federico Borromeo, the merger of active and contemplative life as expressed by St Carlo was made more evident. Federico Borromeo stressed the notions of the perfection of life, meaning actions that demonstrate the love of God and others, and self-contemplation; in other words, penance.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout the liturgical calendar, Advent and Lent were the obvious focal points for such activities, since they allowed for a gradual, weekly, preparation that culminated in the two most important feasts, Christmas and Easter. In a pastoral letter on Septuagesima Sunday<sup>149</sup> 1574, Carlo Borromeo invited the faithful to fast, pray, visit churches, and hear sacred sermons.<sup>150</sup> He equally admonished against the excesses of carnival, the greatest single occasion of mass debauchery during the year. He knew how convenient it was to sin freely during carnival, with Lent around the corner ready to offer confession and absolution before Easter. Borromeo therefore sought to remove carnival completely to sanctify daily life altogether. In 1572 he obtained a plenary indulgence as a reward for those who on carnival Sunday went to confession and communion instead.<sup>151</sup> Although the ‘Triumph of Lent’ was far from assured, Borromeo revived the practice of commemorating Lent from the preceding

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<sup>147</sup> Zummo, Giaimo, *Lettere Spirituali Scritte alle Reverende Monache di tutte le Grazie in Palermo...*(Napoli: Niccolò Naso, 1742), 2; ‘ed egli [il Signore] vi fece sentire I digiuni e penitenze, che da voi richiedeva; I quali non erano drizzati a macerare la carne, ma ad annihilare le passioni, e toglier gli effetti, che suol produrre il maledetto Amor proprio...vorrei che ogn’una di voi facesse uno stretto esame del frutto fatto...’

<sup>148</sup> See: De Boer (2001).

<sup>149</sup> Ninth Sunday before easter, third before Lent.

<sup>150</sup> De Boer (2001), 325.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

weeks of Septuagesima Sexagesima and Quinquagesima, (ninth, eight and seventh Sundays before Easter), no doubt a move to counteract the famous long Milanese carnival that traditionally stretched to the first Sunday after Ash Wednesday. Equally, Borromeo's aim was to make confession a monthly if not a weekly routine, and not limited only to the big feasts. That way the confessor would become one's 'director of conscience'. In short, sanctifying daily life could be attained by introducing a mentality of constant self-examination. He also encouraged confession and communion on occasions particular to one's personal life, such as before embarking on a voyage or a military campaign or in the eventuality of illness.<sup>152</sup> Michel de Certeau described Borromeo's techniques as a "wedding of rhetoric and management, of spirituality and politics",<sup>153</sup> a model that on paper also suited the Order of St John, which was itself, an embodiment of this marriage between spirituality and politics. Nevertheless, one should not confuse episcopal ideals with social reality. It is very likely that, in the case of Milan, the Borromeo ideal was not reached until the first half of the seventeenth century, and mostly thanks to the episcopate of his cousin Federico Borromeo who succeeded him.

### ***New city, fresh problems***

Against all odds, the Order survived the Ottoman siege of Malta in 1565, and for many reasons decided they needed a new city on Mount Sciberras, a project which had been pending for years. Since their arrival, the knights had limited themselves to adapting the urban spaces they found on the island to their needs, without having the opportunity to build a *convento* from the ground up. The city, paid for by Pope Pius V, was named Valletta, after the Grand Master who had led the defence of Malta and laid its foundation stone.<sup>154</sup> The date chosen for the laying of the first stone was Thursday, 28 March 1566. The gospel of the day narrated Christ's miracle of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Naim.<sup>155</sup> This is the

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> De Certeau, Michel, 'Carlo Borromeo santo', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 20 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1977), 265; De Boer (2001), 324.

<sup>154</sup> See: DeGiorgio, Roger, *A City by an Order* (Malta: Progress P., 1985).

<sup>155</sup> Zammit Ciantar, Joe, 'Orations of the Victory of the Order of St John over the Turks in 1565 on the occasion of the Laying of the Foundation Stone of Valletta in 1566', *Symposia Melitensia*. 2008, Vol.5, 11.



interpretation that Giacomo Bosio, the Order's official historian, gave to the gospel of that day: 'A joyous and saintly prophecy. It is as if with this [gospel] God wanted to convey, that this holy Religion and Illustrious Militia of St John of Jerusalem, that until recently was close to being dead, and almost buried in the ruins of the besieged and weak fortresses... with the construction of this strong and invincible city we are resurrected to a new life'.<sup>156</sup> Carmelina Gugliuzzo's recent study on 'Building a sense of belonging' focuses precisely on this loss that the Order experienced in every aspect except its fame.<sup>157</sup> Confronted with this crisis, some members of the Order's Council had suggested abandoning Malta altogether. Choosing to hold on to Malta meant that the Order needed to change. As historian Victor Mallia-Milanes adds:

'There is a vast weight of evidence, if such be needed, to indicate the long-term changes which the outcome of the siege set in motion. The new dynamism which wrapped the Hospital's personality and dictated its performance in subsequent years and the profound structural transformation which Hospitaller Malta and its native inhabitants were gradually to experience in all spheres of social and economic activity are two major pronounced symptoms of this phenomenon.'<sup>158</sup>

This transformation brought about by the siege effected all spheres but one; spirituality. Writing in hindsight in 1647, the Order's Vice-Chancellor and historian Fra Gian Francesco Abela admitted in hindsight that so much energy had gone into the construction of Valletta that the Order had initially neglected to invest enough in the spiritual wellbeing of its inhabitants: '*...the Sacred Jerusalemite Religion, that applied itself to other more important thoughts, principally to fortify that site of Valletta and prepare for another siege that the Turk*

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<sup>156</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione Religione ed Illustrissima Milizia...Vol. III, (Roma: Stamperia Apostolica Vaticana, 1594), 744; '*Felicissimo in vero, e santo presagio. Quasi che con questo accennar ci volesse il Signore, che questa sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gierosolimitano la quale poco dianzi era stata molto vicina a morte, e quasi sepolta nelle rovine di quelle assediate, e deboli Fortezze; all' hora con l'edificazione di questa fortissima, e inespugnabile Città, che si cominciava, risuscitasse a nuova vita...*'

<sup>157</sup> Gugliuzzo, Carmelina, 'Building a sense of belonging. The foundation of Valletta in Malta' in *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe*, Delbeke and Schraven (eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 215.

<sup>158</sup> Mallia-Milanes, Victor, 'Fra Jean de Vallette 1495-1568 – A reappraisal', in *Valletta: Malta's Hospitaller City* (Valletta: Midsea, 2019), 75.

*threatened, failed to take spiritual care of the new city...'*<sup>159</sup> With the privilege of hindsight, Abela knew that the lack of attention given to the spiritual reform of the Order was to have drastic effects, threatening the safety and very existence of the Order as much as the Ottomans.

Carlo Borromeo would often reiterate the importance of 'speaking to Jerusalem's heart', meaning building and controlling the conscience of the faithful.<sup>160</sup> The comparison between the physical Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem in the sky, and the everyday city was not new in the late sixteenth century. Already by 1566, during the ceremony of laying the first stone of Valletta, the Augustinian orator Spirito Pelo Anguiscola based his sermon on the Psalm that reads: 'On the holy mount stands the city he founded ... glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God'.<sup>161</sup> The knights looked at Valletta with a particular idea in mind, an aspiration that went beyond the physical. Francesco Russo suggested that this almost utopian view was, at times, more concerned with the encroachment of episcopal jurisdiction<sup>162</sup> than with an effective creation of a city that was a fortress in a physical as well as a spiritual sense. Although Borromeo faced similar problems in Milan, he managed to create some form of spiritual unity. Gabriele Paleotti, the Archbishop of Bologna, claimed as much in a sermon he delivered in Milan in 1582; it appeared to him that he was seeing another Jerusalem.<sup>163</sup> Valletta in 1582, on the other hand, was far from being a new Jerusalem, as multiple letters sent to Borromeo by many concerned parties illustrate. This was a matter that had long been side-lined on the Order's agenda. Cardinal Borromeo had expressed the same sentiments in a 1581 letter to the Pope on the overdue reform of the Order: '*the Grand Masters of our times, it is clear,*

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<sup>159</sup> Abela says this in the context of the secular and religious clergy's dominant pastoral presence in the early years of Valletta; Abela, Gian Francesco, *Della Descrizione di Malta* (Malta: Bonacota, 1647), 375-6; "...[la] Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana, che applicata ad altri più importanti pensieri, e principalmente di fortificarsi nel sito della Valletta, et a prepararsi di sostener un'altro assedio, che le minacciava il Turco trascurò di pretender, ch'è a lei solamente toccar dovea la giurisdittione, e cura spirituale della nuova Città..."; For a detailed study on the relationship between the Diocese and the Order in Valletta, see: Russo, Francesco, *Un Ordine, una Città, una Diocesi; La Giurisdizione Ecclesiastico nel Principato Monastico di Malta in Età Moderna (1523-1722)* (Aprilia: Aracne Ed., 2017).

<sup>160</sup> De Boer, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Psalm 86 (87); The original text of the oration is preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze, Fondo Gino Capponi 37, MS 878, f.125-136; Zammit Ciantar, 12-13; It was to be expected that a follower of St Augustine spoke of the City of God.

<sup>162</sup> Russo, *Un ordine, una città, una diocesi*, 106-7.

<sup>163</sup> Stewart, Pamela, 'Staging the Passion in the Ritual City: Stational Crosses and Confraternal Spectacle in Late Renaissance Milan' in Presciutti, Diana Bullen (ed.), *Space, Place, and Motion, Locating Confraternities in the Late Medieval and Early Modern City* (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2017), 242.

*have their eyes set on a great many things, except on ensuring that their knights lived with Christian discipline...'.<sup>164</sup>*

Borromeo's letter proved prophetic, as only months later, disorders within the Order escalated in a *coup d'état* against Grand Master La Cassiere.<sup>165</sup> The motives and build-up of events that led to the Knight's unprecedented action against the head of their Order have been discussed at length in works by Carmel Testa, Emmanuel Buttigieg, and Russo.<sup>166</sup> The historiography has given ample importance to La Cassiere's decision to expel prostitutes from Valletta, as well as to his ripe age provoking the greed of senior knights, eager for the top position.<sup>167</sup> While both were definitely among the many factors that led to the uprising, the crux of the matter lay buried much deeper. It lay in the very definition of what a knight should be, as the Order could be considered *sui generis* when compared to both other religious orders or secular institutions, and oftentimes needed to find original solutions to its uncertainties. To give definition to the Order, the Hospitaller vocation, and the much-needed sense of direction, a Chapter General was needed. As a great promoter of collective responsibility, Carlo Borromeo's letters to individual knights show that he believed it was the institution that needed to be reformed and not merely a few individuals, something that only the Chapter General could accomplish.

Since both the Grand Master and Fra Mathurin Lescaut (Romegas),<sup>168</sup> who was blamed for spearheading the whole affair, died in the months following these tumults, few who have studied the topic have attempted to stretch the timespan of the investigation to the years that followed. In truth, even Carlo Borromeo himself believed that once Romegas was dead,

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<sup>164</sup> Arch. S. Carlo ai Catinari, Roma, *Lettere di Governo* P.2, Vol. II, 365; 28 February 1581; "*Perciocche i Gran Maestri a nostri tempi si vede che hanno occhio ad ogni altra cosa piu, che a provvedere che i suoi cavvalieri vivano con quella disciplina christiana, alla quale sono obbligati*".

<sup>165</sup> The coup took place on the 6 July 1581; Russo, Francesco, *Un Ordine, una Città, una Diocesi; La Giurisdizione Ecclesiastico nel Principato Monastico di Malta in Età Moderna (1523-1722)* (Aprilia: Aracne Ed., 2017); Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *Historia della Sacra Religione di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta...* (Verona: Giovanni Berno, 1703), 181-190.

<sup>166</sup> For an analysis on the 1581 *coup*, see: Buttigieg, Emanuel, *Nobility, Faith and Masculinity* (London: Continuum, 2011), 83-87; Russo, *Un Ordine...* (2017); Testa, Carmel, *Romegas* (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2002).

<sup>167</sup> Buttigieg, *Nobility...*, 83-84. This is partly based on the interpretation given by the Order's historian Bartolomeo dal Pozzo, who could not possibly justify in any other way the forceful removal of a Grand Master.

<sup>168</sup> See: Testa, Carmel, *Romegas* (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2002).

the reform of the Order would take place in earnest.<sup>169</sup> Other religious institutions might have had individuals who misbehaved but the problem for the Order, as noted by Borromeo, was that the right path was not being made clear enough by those who were duty-bound to do so. The fact that the Order did not allocate space for a *collachio* in a city they had built from the ground up was also considered a shortcoming in what was meant to be a convent-city. This issue was not limited to Malta. Those away from the watchful eye of the Order's Council were more at liberty to do as they pleased. In 1582, for instance, one of Borromeo's close collaborators and student, Giovanni Fontana,<sup>170</sup> wrote to the Cardinal complaining about troublesome knights in Milan.<sup>171</sup>

Some contemporary and later sources placed the onus of these failures on Grand Master La Cassiere, even though in more recent historiography he has been associated with an example of piety and discipline considering his efforts to eradicate prostitution from the streets of Valletta and his patronage of the Conventual Church and the *Sacra Infermeria*. When the dissident knights entered his room to arrest him, eventually locking him up in St Angelo, they found him contemplating the crucifix. He turned to his aggressors and in the words of Christ on the cross, he retorted '...forgive them, for they know not what they are doing'.<sup>172</sup> He then blessed his enemies with the crucifix; but this did not deter them, and they took him out of the Palace where he was met by a crowd of armed knights and soldiers. This time, he borrowed a sentence from the arrest of Christ in the Gethsemane and turning to the armed guard, he said '...with swords and clubs you have come to forcibly take me.'<sup>173</sup> For all this, it seems that a Grand Master with such deep religious conviction failed to make a lasting impact on the spiritual fabric of the Order and the new city. A possible explanation is offered by one

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<sup>169</sup> B.A.M., F60 INF, f.397; Carlo Borromeo to Mons. Spetiano, 5 November 1581.

<sup>170</sup> Frangarezzi, Riccardo (ed.), Giovanni Fontana, *Vicario di S. Carlo Borromeo a Nantola e a Milano e Vescovo di Ferrara* (Modena, Artestampa, 2012).

<sup>171</sup> B.A.M, F63 INF, 39r-v.; for more case studies and an in-depth discussion of knights' misdeeds see: Cassar, Carmel, 'Monks of Honour: The Knights of Malta and Criminal Behaviour in Early Modern Rome', in *Exploring Cultural History, Essays in Honour of Peter Burke*, Calaresu, de Vivo and Rubiés (eds.) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 77-92; For some case studies from Malta, see: Zammit, William, *Kissing the Gallows, A Cultural History of Crime, Torture and Punishment in Malta 1600-1798* (Malta: BDL, 2016).

<sup>172</sup> Buttigieg (2011), 102; B.A.V., Barb. Lat., Ms.5333, f.138r.; A.A.V., S.S. Malta, Ms1., f.80r-81r., 12<sup>th</sup> July 1581.

<sup>173</sup> Buttigieg (2011), 102; Barb. Lat., Ms.5333, f.138r.

of the letters unearthed in the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in Milan, written by Fra Ferrante Maggiolini to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo.<sup>174</sup>

Fra Ferrante Maggiolini joined the Order on 24 September 1565,<sup>175</sup> a few weeks after Borromeo's sermon in the Duomo and only days after the Ottoman siege was lifted. Writing in 1579, he was the first of a series of Milanese knights to approach Borromeo about the matter of internal reform,<sup>176</sup> proving that the cardinal's reputation as a Church reformer was already well established, at least within his diocese. At the time of the letter, the dethronement of la Cassiere had not yet taken place, but the knight already anticipated that something sinister would result from the quarrels between the Grand Master and Bishop, as well as the seemingly widespread promiscuity, duelling, and swearing.<sup>177</sup> He wrote that the knights appeared confused, in part because of the lack of direction that the Statutes of the Order offered. The tone of the letter conveys Maggiolini's deep sense of disappointment, so much so that it is not surprising to discover that he eventually left the Order of St John to become a Capuchin.<sup>178</sup> *'His Holiness ordered that he be sent a copy of our statutes, which to many appear confused...so, moved by your kindness I took the presumption to pour out with you, to tell you of this great need that our Religion [the Order] has for reform...'*<sup>179</sup> Despite this deep sense of bleakness, the proposals that the knight presented to Borromeo are indicative of a belief that things could improve. He believed that a spiritual reform had to be founded on a renewed sacramentalisation of the knights' daily life, starting with communion.<sup>180</sup> He also suggested the reading of sacred scriptures during meals in the auberges. Fra Maggiolini believed in the establishment of a Jesuit college in Malta and must have known of the ongoing

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<sup>174</sup> B.A.M., F148 INF, f.408, 22 October 1579.

<sup>175</sup> Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo Generale de' Cavalieri Gerosolimitani della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia* (Messina: Vincenzo d'Amico, 1689), 108-9.

<sup>176</sup> B.A.M., F148 INF, f.408, 22 October 1579; Maggiolini, was one of the knights who went to Rome in 1582. Fra Giorgio Nibbia and Fra Ferrante Maggiolini were the ones who carried to Malta the Pope's bull to 47thhold elections for the new Grand Master when La Cassiere died in December: Dal Pozzo (1703), 212.

<sup>177</sup> B.A.M., F148 INF, f.408, 22 Octobe. 1579

<sup>178</sup> Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 108-9.

<sup>179</sup> F148 INF, f.408r-v; "che Sua Sta. a [sic] comando che gli siano mandati li nostri statuti li quali a molti parono confusi... per questo mosso da questa sua carita ho preso presuntione di sfogarmi con lei scrivendogli il grandissimo bisogno che a [sic] questa nostra religione di riforma...".

<sup>180</sup> B.A.M., F148 INF, f.408: "...suplicarla [a Borromeo] che voglia fare quanto potra in aiuto di essa, cioe almeno di una qualche principio di riforma come sarebbe con fare frequentare piu spesso li santissimi sacramenti, ovvero che almeno li quattro volti che siamo obbligati a comunicarsi ogni anno vi sia fatto osservare..."

talks between the Bishop of Malta Gargallo and Grand Master La Cassiere to split the expenses that a possible Jesuit institution would incur.

Borromeo was not indifferent to these problems and frequently told Pope Gregory XIII that something concrete needed to be done.<sup>181</sup> The Pope had already sent a Nuncio accompanied by two Jesuits to Malta in 1576, with the intent of delivering a few sermons and sharing some sacred literature with the knights, but that clearly was not enough.<sup>182</sup> Then, in the summer of 1581, Pope Gregory XIII sent Cardinal Gaspare Visconti as his envoy to Malta to report back on what was perceived to be a worsening situation. Visconti was also from Milan, a protégé of Borromeo and eventually his successor as the city's bishop. All evidence points to Borromeo being the one to suggest Visconti for the delicate mission to Malta. Once on the island in August 1581, Visconti wrote to Borromeo with news and to request his advice.<sup>183</sup>

### ***The 'Reformed' Knights***

Carlo Borromeo had been hard at work on the matter of reforming the Order even before the *coup* against La Cassiere took place. Whilst Fra Ferrante Maggiolini had suggested the Jesuits to lead the spiritual revival of the Order, Fra Categliano Casati, also Milanese, suggested instead a mission by the Barnabites.<sup>184</sup> Borromeo had a close affinity with the Barnabites, particularly since, as a Congregation of Clerics Regular born in Milan, they owed much of their spiritual charisma to him.<sup>185</sup> The Barnabites found it difficult to identify two priests to send to the island, stating that their resources were strained and that they were not able to sustain a

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<sup>181</sup> B.A.M., F59 INF., f.71v; Premoli, Orazio, *Storia dei Barnabiti nel Cinquecento* (Roma: Disclee ed., 1913), 313.

<sup>182</sup> De Palma, Luigi Michele, *Il Frate Cavaliere. Il tipo ideale di Giovannita fra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Bari: Eucumentica, 2015), 82.

<sup>183</sup> B.A.M., F53 INF., f.440r; Visconti became Borromeo's successor as Bishop of Milan three years later.

<sup>184</sup> This is understood from a later correspondence between Casati and the General Superior of the Barnabites in 1586, the famous Borromeo hagiographer Bascapé; *Epistolario Generalizio dei Barnabiti 1586*, op.cit. Premoli, (appendix).

<sup>185</sup> On the Barnabites in the sixteenth century, see: Bonora, Elena, *I conflitti della Controriforma: Santità e obbedienza nell'esperienza religiosa dei primi barnabiti* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1998).

mission to a place so distant.<sup>186</sup> Finally, they elected to send Padre Paolo Maletta and Padre Antonio Marchesi, whose arrival was further delayed by bad weather.<sup>187</sup> It took Borromeo a full year to organise the mission to Malta, from the first mention of Maletta as a potential leader of the expedition, to the eventual arrival of Maletta and Marchesi in Malta.<sup>188</sup> So far, only one 'Maltese' letter from Maletta to Borromeo has been identified,<sup>189</sup> possibly owing to the relatively short sojourn of the Barnabite priests. Nevertheless, this very detailed letter describes the Barnabites' activity in the first two months from their arrival, which coincided with the first two months of the reign of the new Grand Master Verdalle. It conveys all the hallmarks of Borromean spirituality. The first part of the letter describes the actions and spiritual activities of a group of reformed knights who lived together in a retreat house.<sup>190</sup> Maletta and Marchesi were hosted by these knights and acted as their spiritual directors.

'...upon orders from His Holiness we [Pre. Maletta and Pre. Marchesi] have been given the faculty to absolve reserved cases [of sin] including ones in the Bull *Coena Domini*, except for heresy and attempts against the prince [Grand Master]. Your Illustrious Reverence will therefore be informed how we are now in the blessed house of these gentlemen knights, retired to live as a community and in observance of their vows, attentive towards your [Borromeo's] spiritual exercises at home together with our intervention and assistance, especially in the morning and evening prayers in unison and with other spiritual meals[.] [Outside] the house, aside from the celebration of the divine offices and the hospital service, they also see to the care of the prisoners and the Poor, they escort those condemned to death when necessary, [and] the elderly among them see to the maintenance of a house for poor single girls taken during the day from their dishonest mothers before they are forced into prostitution of which there are

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<sup>186</sup> B.A.M., F.16 INF., f.12, f.22, January 1581; F.60 INF., f.41v., 13<sup>th</sup> May 1581; Premoli, Orazio, *Storia dei Barnabiti nel Cinquecento* (Roma: Disclee ed., 1913), 563; It is interesting to note what the religious orders and congregations considered distant, as a means of understanding where the epicentre of their intended activity was.

<sup>187</sup> Maletta and Marchesi were hosted by the Theatines in Naples for three months, before they could set sail again towards Malta sometime between December 1581 and January 1582; Premoli, p.563.

<sup>188</sup> The name of Maletta is first mentioned in B.A.M., F16 INF, 18 January 1581. Maletta wrote to inform Borromeo that he had arrived in Malta on 20 January 1582. He was writing on 15 March: B.A.M., F62 INF., f.376.

<sup>189</sup> B.A.M., F62 INF., f.376r-v.

<sup>190</sup> Although Maletta does not call it 'Camerata', he is describing the same place and the same group of knights.

thirty-two who are kept under custody by some good-natured women who teaching them spiritual things and other lessons. One of these knights was the first to commence this act of charity,<sup>191</sup> not without great challenges and machinations by the Devil. These knights also frequently receive the holy sacraments and beseech other knights to do so as well, in all this however they still do not neglect to exercise in the bearing of arms which is so necessary for them since some of them go on the galleys to go out corsairing and I am asked by them to plead for your protection and prayers and holy sacrifice since they find themselves like flowers among thorns.<sup>192</sup>

Defining them as 'like flowers among thorns' is a particularly interesting turn of phrase. It is an adaptation of the verse 'like a lily among thorns', taken from the Song of Songs (2:2) in the Old Testament. It was generally used as a reference to the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Therefore, the Barnabite is comparing the chastity of these knights with that of the Virgin Mary. *Sicut lilum inter spinas* was a popular way to distinguish between Mary's birth and the birth of all other women, in this case implying a difference between some knights and these particular knights, noble in their souls as much as being noble in blood. Maletta did not mention the names of any of these knights, yet we know from other documents that the main protagonists were Fra Categliano and Fra Giovanni Battista Casati (Milan),<sup>193</sup> Fra Giulio Zanchini (Florence)<sup>194</sup> and Fra Bernardo D'Espelta (Navarre).<sup>195</sup> This is not the first instance we find of a group of knights calling themselves 'reformed' and living in a communal house in Valletta. A 1582 map of Valletta by the artist Matteo Perez d'Aleccio shows 'the house of Sig.

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<sup>191</sup> It is safe to assume that he was referring to Fra Categliano Casati who was the first procurator of this house; Dal Pozzo (1703), 523.

<sup>192</sup> B.A.M., F62 INF., f.376; See: *Appendix 1*.

<sup>193</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 376.

<sup>194</sup> Zanchini was later instrumental in disseminating the devotion towards St Ubaldesca in Malta: in 1586, he helped bring the relics of the saint to the island; Dal Pozzo (1703), 275.

<sup>195</sup> Or D'Espelta, future Prior of Navarre and founder of the Oratory of the Beheading of St John; from a letter in S. Carlo ai Catinari dated 1583 to the new Barnabite Superior Padre Maino, reproduced in Premoli (1913), 564.

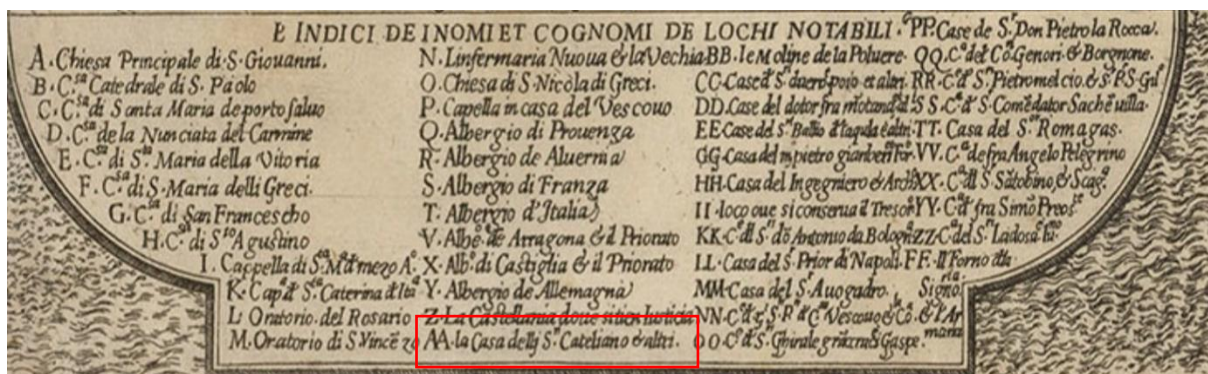


Catelliano & altri', close to Fort St Elmo at the end of what today is called Merchant's Street (Fig. 3).

In 1581, a group of knights, probably this same one, wanted to meet la Cassiere to ask him to sanction their new way of living, but the Grand Master was advised not to grant them an audience, lest it create a schism within the Order.<sup>196</sup> Only days after the Grand Master was overthrown, the same group of knights, led by Fra Cosmo di Luna,<sup>197</sup> presented a petition to the Pope, asking for his protection. Fra Luna was one of the supporters of the rebel leader



Figure 3: Map of Valletta, Matteo Perez d'Aleccio (1582) [detail], Royal Collection Trust source: <https://militarymaps.rct.uk/ottoman-habsburg-wars-1521-1791/siege-of-malta-1565-la-nvova-citta-e-fortezza-di>



<sup>196</sup> Palma, *Il Frate Cavaliere*, 82.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*; B.A.V., Urb. Lat. 1049, f. 280v-281r.;

Romegas and was also chosen to form part of the commission tasked with justifying the *coup* to the Pope.<sup>198</sup> Luna's support of the *coup*, coupled with his desire for reform means that we cannot assume that all the knights opposed to la Cassiere were against a way of life that more closely reflected the Rule. It emerges that some of them were the ones pushing for reform to happen.

One way of reading Luna's talk of reform is to see it as a means to justify the unjustifiable: the act of physical violence and shaming of their Master. Conversely Luna's prior contact with Mons. Cesare Spetiano, Borromeo's close friend and lieutenant in Rome, and Mons. Luigi Torres, Bishop of Monreale who had acted as an arbiter in Malta on other occasions,<sup>199</sup> indicates that Fra Luna and his comrades (*Camerati*) were also genuinely striving for Hospitaller reform. To this end, Fra Cosmo di Luna sent concrete proposals to Mons. Spetiano on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1581.<sup>200</sup> He told Spetiano that there was a total of sixteen knights '*living and eating*' together but he was afraid that some of the other knights were so opposed to what they were doing that they were willing to '*pull their house down*' to stop them.<sup>201</sup> Fra Luna also confirmed knowledge of the prospective Barnabite mission and described Padre Maletta as their friend.

There are many similarities between the letter sent by Fra Maggiolini to Borromeo in 1579 and that of Fra Cosmo di Luna. The aspect of communal living, the necessity for doctrinal lessons and above all the need to convene a Chapter General to put the reform in writing in the Statutes of the Order, are common elements in all correspondence. Like Fra Maggiolini, Luna believed in the need to establish a Jesuit college in Malta '*with a dozen priests, two or three from each nation, including the Rev. Father Giovanni Battista Carminata, the Provincial of Sicily.*' Carminata had been one of the two Jesuits who accompanied the Papal Nuncio in 1576.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, the Jesuits had similar problems of their own. In 1581 General Claudio Acquaviva took over the leadership of the Jesuit Order, inheriting a series of internal problems

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<sup>198</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 184.

<sup>199</sup> He had intervened to resolve a quarrel between Bishop Gargallo and Grand Master La Cassiere in 1579, see: Russo, 91.

<sup>200</sup> Bibl. Trivulziana, Milano, Triv. 1144, f.68; first published by Vianello, C.A., '*Proposte del 1581 per una riforma dell'Ordine di Malta*', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, X (1939), 244-256; Palma, 86.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, '*ci getteranno la casa per terra*'

<sup>202</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 484.

from his predecessors of both the temporal and spiritual kind.<sup>203</sup> The similarities with the problems that the Order of St John was facing are noteworthy. Among these quarrels within the Jesuit order was the return to a stricter adherence to Ignatian spirituality, which caused friction between the order's leadership and a group of 'zelanti'.<sup>204</sup> The Jesuit Constitutions, much like the Order's Statutes, came under fire for being inadequate. Considering this, as well as other concerns such as the accusation of rampant *alumbradismo*,<sup>205</sup> the Jesuit establishment of a *Collegium Melitensis* could not take place in the 1580s.

Meanwhile, Spetiano wrote to Borromeo to tell him that he had passed on Luna's suggestions to the Pope but had then instructed the knight and his confreres to return to Malta where they could make themselves more useful to the cause.<sup>206</sup> This provides a backdrop for the unnamed group of knights that Padre Maletta commended in his report to Borromeo. The two Barnabites were expected to provide for the spiritual reform of the entire institution and not solely of those who were already reformed. Returning to Maletta's report to Borromeo from Malta, the second part details the spiritual work they were doing for the benefit of the Order at large:

'These [knights] also help us in the propagation of Christian doctrine which, thank the Lord, we have started in this New City with the attendance of many ....Furthermore to satisfy the requests of many who have sought us out for the service of the clergy and to occupy in something worthwhile these knights of the Religion who have a lot of time on their hands for idleness, inept as I am, I have commenced lessons at the start of this Lent on the seven penitential Psalms with the supplement of a few cases of conscience, delivering them in the main church [St John's]...on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, since

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<sup>203</sup> Manning, Patricia, *An Overview of the Pre-suppression Society of Jesus in Spain* (Brill, 2021), 32; Brodrick, James, *The Progress of the Jesuits (1556-79)* (Chicago: Loyola U.P., 1986); Dalton, Jessica M., *Between Popes, Inquisitors and Princes: How the First Jesuits Negotiated Religious Crisis in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020).

<sup>204</sup> Rurale, Flavio, 'Le "fatiche" del Generale Claudio Acquaviva e i confessor di corte' in Padre Claudio Acquaviva S.J. preposito generale della Compagnia di Gesù e il suo tempo, Martin M. Morales, R. Ricci (eds.) (L'Aquila: Edizioni Libreria Colacchi, 2018), 116; see also: Rurale, Flavio, 'La Compagnia di Gesù Tra Riforme, Controriforme e Riconferma dell'Istituto (1540-inizio XVII Secolo),' *Religione, conflittualità e cultura. Il clero regolare nell'Europa d'antico regime*, Cheiron, Anno XXII, n.43-44 (2005), 25-52.

<sup>205</sup> Manning, 37.

<sup>206</sup> B.A.M. F60 INF., f.358: 25 November 1581.

on Saturday out of devotion for the Madonna I recite in the same place the angelic prayers [Angelus]...'<sup>207</sup>

A lot of importance was given to the character and role of the Grand Master, with the memory of what had passed under la Cassiere still being a sore point for the Order.<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, the Papacy had intervened directly in the election by proposing three candidates for the electors to choose one for the magistracy. The candidate chosen was Fra Hugh Loubenx de Verdalle, whose candidacy was considered to be a compromise between the various factions. He was one of the Order's ambassadors in Rome during the La Cassiere debacle and contributed to smoothing things over as much as possible, particularly since the complete dissolution of the Order could not be excluded. Since the commencement of the Barnabite mission coincided roughly with the election of Verdalle, Maletta's words just two months later were an indication to Borromeo of the direction that the Order would take from that point onwards.<sup>209</sup> The report was promising:

'This Grand Master, newly elected soon after our arrival, is a very discreet, prudent and mature person, and shows great attention to matters of piety and religion[.] Every morning before giving audience, he retreats to his chapel where he prays for half an hour, and every day apart from his private mass he also attends high mass if he is not too busy with matters of Council, equally he also attends the *vespers* and *compline*. He also requested that I go to him once a week to stay with him for an hour to discuss spiritual matters, and he shows much desire to do as His Holiness requires, so he has asked me to recommend him to your [Borromeo's] prayers...for his faith he deserves that you keep him in mind [so] that he can continue to carry the weight he has on his shoulders'<sup>210</sup>

Despite the hopeful news, long-term reform needed more definite solutions and not only ones that relied on individuals. The Barnabite initiatives in Malta were certainly beneficial, but they were dependent on the disposition of individual knights to carry them forward. Fra

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<sup>207</sup> B.A.M., F62 INF., f.376.

<sup>208</sup> La Cassiere died on the 21 December YEAR.

<sup>209</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 215.

<sup>210</sup> B.A.M. F62 INF., f.376v., *Appendix 1*.

Categliano Casati was not so sure the Order would move forward with reform, in fact, he wrote to Borromeo in August of that same year, to tell him that not much had changed and that the only way for change to be permanent would be if the Chapter General was supervised by a clergyman of repute like Mons. Spetiano.<sup>211</sup> Although we do not have Borromeo's reply to Casati, it is hard to imagine that the bishop, whose chief tool for reform was Synodality, would have been against the convening of a Chapter General. Along with Spetiano, with whom Borromeo frequently discussed the case of Malta, the Cardinal-Bishop of Milan was also in contact with Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio,<sup>212</sup> Secretary of State and private secretary of Pope Gregory XIII.<sup>213</sup> Arguably the most powerful Cardinal in the Papal Curia, Tolomeo Gallio had the means to ensure that the Order convened a Chapter General, if not out of conviction, out of obedience. Cardinal Gallio, known also as the Cardinal di Como, had been a lifelong collaborator of Borromeo and, like others, owed his ascent to the most powerful of positions to Borromeo. In a letter dated 17 March 1583, Tolomeo assured Borromeo that he did everything in his power to help both the temporal and spiritual reform of the Order and believed his efforts would soon bear fruit.<sup>214</sup>

Fra Casati, it seems, felt that the presence of the Barnabites in Malta, albeit beneficial, was entirely reliant on fathers Maletta and Marchesi. After a short while, Padre Maletta fell ill and was recalled to Rome. He would eventually find his way back to Milan where he died in February 1584, comforted with the sacraments at his deathbed by Carlo Borromeo himself.<sup>215</sup> The Barnabites, who had only sent two priests to Malta in 1581 out of papal obedience, saw in Maletta's infirmity an opportunity to cancel the mission altogether. Fra Categliano and others promptly wrote to the Barnabite Mattia Maino to allow at least Padre Antonio Marchesi to remain, if not permanently, at least until they reached an agreement with another religious order to have a replacement.<sup>216</sup> The letter included a veiled threat, that they would once again mobilise their connections in Rome to have Marchesi stay due to papal obedience. Marchesi was allowed to stay until Padre Carlo Bascapè became Superior General

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<sup>211</sup> B.A.M. F66 INF., f.173r; 10 August 1582.

<sup>212</sup> B.A.M. F60 INF., f.342, 15 November 1581; F62 INF., f.260, 17 March 1582.

<sup>213</sup> See: Mennitti, Ippolito Antonio, 'The Secretariat of State as the Pope's Special Ministry', *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, Signorotto and Visceglia* (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004), 132-157.

<sup>214</sup> B.A.M, F62 inf. 136, f.260r.

<sup>215</sup> Premoli, 316.

<sup>216</sup> *op. cit.* Premoli, 564

of the Barnabites in 1586. Bascapè had other plans for Marchesi, so he informed Fra Categliano Casati that he would be recalling the Barnabite, beseeching him out of friendship to not hinder the move.<sup>217</sup> Paradoxically, Bascapè had been Borromeo's personal secretary, and is considered one of the major exponents of the Borromean reform in Lombardy.<sup>218</sup> Carlo Borromeo had since died (d. 4 November 1584), so there was little else that Casati could do except to turn to another religious order for assistance.

### ***Cantiere Aperto***

In the years between 1590 and 1600, the Order invited to Malta two very important counter-reformation orders, the Capuchins (1588) and the Jesuits (1593). The Jesuit establishment in Malta resulted from the direct intervention of Fra Categliano Casati, who personally went to Rome to ask the Pope to intercede directly with Grand Master Verdalle and Bishop Gargallo.<sup>219</sup> The matter of the establishment of the Jesuits had been left pending since 1553,<sup>220</sup> with the final hurdle seemingly being a monetary one.<sup>221</sup> The Jesuits viewed Malta as a launchpad for their North African missions, believing that potential Maltese recruits would be quick in learning Arabic,<sup>222</sup> whereas the Diocese of Malta needed a seminary for the preparation of diocesan priests, as decreed by the Council of Trent. With the support of Cardinals Federico Borromeo, Cusano and Piatti, Fra Categliano Casati finally obtained the papal approval to have twelve Jesuits transferred to Malta, the same number that Fra Cosmo de Luna had proposed in his 1581 letter to Spetiano. The Order's chronicler, Dal Pozzo, wrote that representing the Jesuits at the establishment of the *Collegium Melitense* were Padre

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<sup>217</sup> Epistolario Generalizio dei Barnabiti, 2 June 1586; "...Iddio sa cio che la Congregazione pati per la forza che ci fu fatta l'altra volta, ma ora speriamo nella loro Bonta, che s'acquetereanno..."; This letter is particularly valuable as it is the earliest documented reference to the knights in the retreat house as "*signori cavalieri della Camerata*".

<sup>218</sup> Dell'Oro, Giorgio, 'Il tradimento delle istanze Tridentine, Carlo Bascapè voce e interprete di Carlo Borromeo', *Religione, cerimoniale e società nelle terre milanesi dell'età moderna*, Atti del convegno di studi Milano, 2013-2015 (Germignana: La Compagnia de' Bindoni - Magazzino Storico Verbanese, 2018), 295-312.

<sup>219</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 341-342.

<sup>220</sup> Palma, 163.

<sup>221</sup> A.A.V., S.S. *Malta*, Vol.1, f.21-23, 3 December 1582.

<sup>222</sup> Cassar, Carmel, 'The Collegium Melitense: A Frontier Mission in the Interface between the Christian and the Muslim Worlds', *Al-Qantara*, XXXVI 2, julio-diciembre (2015), 443-462.

Gasparo Paraninfo from Sicily and Padre Pietro Casati.<sup>223</sup> Despite Casati's efforts, some elements on the island resisted the establishment of the Jesuits, eventually leading to the funds for the already commenced construction of the Jesuit College in Valletta running out. On that occasion, apart from the financial contribution of Bishop Gargallo, Grand Master Verdalle and Fra Casati, other members of the Order intervened to secure the completion of the project. The list includes the Prior of St John Fra Giorgio Giampieri, Bailiff of S. Stefano Fra Pietro La Rocca,<sup>224</sup> the Bailiff of S. Eufemia Fra Centorio Cagnolo,<sup>225</sup> Fra Stefano Chiaramonte, the Prior of Hungary Fra Vincenzo Carafa,<sup>226</sup> the Prior of Naples Fra Tiberio Campolo,<sup>227</sup> Fra Gonsalvo de Porres (Porras),<sup>228</sup> Fra Bernardo d'Espelta, Fra Francesco Moleti,<sup>229</sup> Fra Francesco Met and Fra Giovanni Vargas.<sup>230</sup><sup>231</sup> Apart from Fra d'Espelta, who was a known member of the Camerata, some or all of the others may also have been part of that group.

As for the Capuchin establishment, there had been contacts between the order and the island long before their official establishment, with the Sicilian provinces sending short missions to the island without committing to a long-term residency. Noteworthy was the presence of Padre Roberto Evoli during the siege of 1565, whose sermons, in-between Turkish assaults, exhorted the knights to continue resisting the enemy.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, the permanent presence of the Capuchins had to wait two decades and was eventually owed to Verdalle's personal fondness towards them, since his brother was a member of that order.<sup>233</sup> The Capuchins, the Jesuits, and subsequently the Oratorians and the Discalced Carmelites, would become four pillars upon which the Order's constant process of reform would rest.

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<sup>223</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 340.

<sup>224</sup> From Messina, came to the assistance of Malta in 1565 '*all'ora ancora Giovanetto sbarbato*'; Bosio III, 661.

<sup>225</sup> From Vercelli, joined the Order in 1550; Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 90-91.

<sup>226</sup> From Naples, later Prior of Capua. Joined the Order in 1583; Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 150-151.

<sup>227</sup> From Calabria, was injured during the siege of 1565; Bosio III, 611.

<sup>228</sup> From Castille; in 1598 appointed ambassador to the Holy See and Spain; died in 1613; Dal Pozzo (1703), 411, 585.

<sup>229</sup> From Messina; died in 1610 after having served as Admiral of the galley squadron; Dal Pozzo (1703), 553.

<sup>230</sup> From Castille, distinguished hero of the siege of 1565; Bosio III, 629.

<sup>231</sup>The names are reported in an early, short history of the establishment of the Jesuit College of Malta, sent to Rome in response to request from General Acquaviva to collect the histories of all provinces; A[rchivum] R[omanum] S[ocietatis] I[esu], *Sicula* 202, ff.98r.- 100v.; *Historia erectionis Collegii Melitensis Societatis Iesu*; Leanza, Antonio, 'La Compagnia di Gesù e la Sacra Milizia Gerosolimitana in Malta', conferenza tenuta nell'Aula magne della Università Di Malta il 2 Maggio 1934 (Malta, University of Malta, 1934).

<sup>232</sup> Cirni, Antonio, *Commentarii* (Roma: Giulio Accolto, 1567), 51; Azzopardi, Francis, 'The activities of the first known Capuchin in Malta Robert of Eboli', *Melita Historica* 4(2), (1965), 96-110.

<sup>233</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 364; Buttigieg (2011), 110; Russo, 100.

Hospitaller Malta was a *cantiere aperto*, a continuous work-in-progress of adaptation of various spiritual ideas and practices. However, the 1579-1586 correspondence on the matter of the Barnabites clearly demonstrates that the earliest form of Tridentine Hospitaller spirituality had all the Borromeo hallmarks. We have only just begun to appreciate how far Borromeo's ideas pervaded the dioceses he interacted with, permeating into the very fabric of everyday devotional life and the very definition of holiness.<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, the wide support that his canonisation process received, as well as the exceptional popularity of his cult, had the desired effect of consolidating his spiritual contribution. In this respect, the Order of St John appears suitable for a case study on many levels.<sup>235</sup> The results of having Borromeo as a spiritual godfather for over two decades can be assessed by comparing how far the Order's definition of holiness resembled the one advocated by Borromeo, notably a holiness that is Eucharistic and Christo-centric, based on true repentance and conversion of the heart, firmly anchored in the cityscape, and organised and documented for posterity. The work that the other religious orders did in Malta gradually built on these maxims, contributing to what we can term a 'spirituality in stages'.

The Borromeo influence in the activities of the Camerata, and eventually on Grand Master Verdalle, can be best identified towards the end of the Cardinal Grand Master's Magistracy when a terrible plague hit Malta in 1592-93. The events of the Milanese *Peste di S. Carlo* fifteen years prior had not been forgotten, least by those who, like Verdalle and the Camerati, had corresponded with Borromeo. Even though the knights were dealing with plague in Valletta for the first time, it was not the first time they suffered pestilence in their history, so they knew exactly how to approach it from a medical perspective. In addition, the idea of general penance and collective sense of spiritual responsibility that Borromeo imparted through his procession of the Holy Nail served as an added tool in the Order's arsenal, the making of Valletta as a *Citta Rituale* necessitated it. Doctor Pietro Parisi from Trapani wrote

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<sup>234</sup> Ditchfield (2011), 8; Ditchfield points out particularly the contribution of Borromeo in the sacramentalising of daily life.

<sup>235</sup> B.A.M. F168 INF., 70r-75v; Marcora, Carlo, *Discorsi inediti di S. Carlo Borromeo nel IV centenario della sua entrata in Milano* (Milano: Pio Istituto pei Figli della Provvidenza, 1965), 87-98.



an account of the events.<sup>236</sup> He described how, in full Borromeoan fashion, a group of ‘good knights of exemplary life’ had organised *quarantore* eucharistic adorations in the church of St Roche, as well as general processions with relics in the city ‘to placate God’s wrath’.<sup>237</sup> These relics included all three pieces of the true cross that the Order owned and a thorn from the Crown of Thorns, which like Borromeo’s Santo Chiodo, drew parallels between Christ’s suffering and theirs. We know for certain that members of the Camerata were actively involved in the sanitisation efforts, since two of the founders, Fra Categliano Casati and Fra Bernardo d’Espelta, were appointed sanitary commissioners tasked with inspecting shops and houses in specific streets. Casati was given St Pantaleon Street (now St Nicholas Street) and d’Espelta was given Fortuna Street (now Hospital Street),<sup>238</sup> the two streets adjacent to the Camerata building.

The natural continuation between the Barnabites and the Jesuits in particular, both early promoters of Borromeoan ideas, is made evident by a set of ‘*Istruttioni*’ that Alessandro Luzzago (1551-1602) gave to those Jesuits who were chosen to go to Malta.<sup>239</sup> Luzzago, a layman from Brescia who died in *odore di santità*, was equally close to Carlo Borromeo and the Jesuits, through both of whom he was involved in various Tridentine initiatives in his native Brescia.<sup>240</sup> His instructions to the Jesuits were aimed at strengthening the doctrinal preparation of the knights, which as discussed above, was what was most lacking. To this end, Luzzago proposed a long list of books or specific chapters that the chaplains should recommend to the knights for meditation. Whilst the reference to Ignatius Loyola and the works of other Jesuits are made abundantly clear, so too was the emphasis on the frequency

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<sup>236</sup> Parisi, Pietro, *Aggiunta Agli Avvertimenti Sopra La Peste dell’Eccellente Pietro Parisi Medico, e Filosofo Trapanese per l’Occasione della Peste di Malta per gli anni del Sig. 1592* (Palermo: Gio Antonio de Franceschi, 1603).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>239</sup> B.A.V., Urb. Lat. 867, f. 358; The letter is discussed at length in Palma (2015), 164-17, and Frugoni, Arsenio, ‘Una “Istruzione per li Cavalieri di Malta” del nobile bresciano Alessandro Luzzago’, *Archivio Storico di Malta*, XVIII (1940), 80-85, who published the two known versions of it, one discovered in Brescia and the other in the Vatican Library.

<sup>240</sup> Frugoni, Arsenio, *Alessandro Luzzago e la sua opera nella Controriforma Bresciana* (Brescia: Casa Ed. F. Apollonio, 1937).

of confession<sup>241</sup> and devotion towards the Eucharist.<sup>242</sup> Similar to the reference made by Padre Maletta on the balance between devotion and the use of arms, Luzzago also reminded the Jesuit chaplains of this duality, suggesting literature for both the Christian soldier and the military chaplain.<sup>243</sup> What is most striking about the *Istruttioni* is the emphasis on building spiritual networks, particularly in the parts in which Luzzago proposes that knights should write devotional letters and send good literature to each other, especially to those who were abroad or in slavery.<sup>244</sup> Apart from prompting various acts of charity, Luzzago also emphasised the importance of circulating good books: “...take many books, or send them so that there will be enough for the knights to disseminate.”<sup>245</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Tridentine spirituality and the Council of Trent need to be approached separately. While the Council itself had an official beginning and an end, Tridentinism is much more gradual, conflicted, and open to interpretation. The relationship between individuals such as Fra Casati, Fra Maggiolini, Fra Espelta, and Fra Luna, with great reformers such as Carlo Borromeo, serves to help us map Hospitaller Malta’s Tridentine progress within a wider web of global Catholicism. This interaction and the initiatives taken, as well as the pitfalls and the legacies, give a more nuanced understanding of what drives continuity and change in spiritual-devotional terms, reinstating the role of the individual in Hospitaller Malta’s Counter-Reformation processes. The documentation further demonstrates that Rome was not always the geographical epicentre, nor was Malta a periphery, rather the international dimension of

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<sup>241</sup> De Boer discusses the role that Bishops like Borromeo and the Jesuits had in social disciplining programs, especially highlighting the role of the former. See: De Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul* (2001), especially pp. 43-83.

<sup>242</sup> Luzzago proposed the works of Bonsignore Cacciaguerra on the Holy Sacrament; B.A.V., Urb. Lat. 867, f. 358.

<sup>243</sup> These include Possevino’s ‘Soldato Cristiano’ and section of Antoniacco da Cugitio’s Catechesis; B.A.V., Urb. Lat. 867, f. 358.; On the preparation of military chaplains, see: Lavenia, Vincenzo, *Dio in uniforme. Cappellani, catechesi cattolica e soldati in età moderna* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2017).

<sup>244</sup> “...riscattar schiavi, or almeno con lettere animarli a conserver la fede mandando loro alcuni libri buoni...”

<sup>245</sup> “...portar molti libri, o mandarli perchè non manchino a quei Cavalieri per disseminare”; B.A.V., Urb. Lat. 867, f. 360.

the Order's members contributed to a constantly changing core. In this case, Borromeo's Milan was clearly the first blueprint for a Tridentine Valletta.

The examples mentioned highlight another facet of the Hospitaller definition of holiness, that is the strong role that individual initiative had in bringing about reform. To understand what was truly considered holy for the Order of St John, one must start by challenging the reading of a Papacy-imposed, ready-made spirituality. Hospitaller actors such as Fra Luna, Fra Casati and others, were active reformers, as much as they were eager beneficiaries of the initiatives of other Church reformers. Ultimately, it was the Order that requested Borromeo's help, first by appointing him their protector, and then by inviting him to follow closely and intercede for the Order's reform, the former being an institutional move whereas the latter was a private initiative. The physical manifestations of that spirituality, such as the patronage of houses and churches, the gifts and relics, the processions, and the written devotional books, are proof of the interaction between the regional and the universal. It also contests the interpretation of Rome as a core and Malta as the periphery, since in this case, the eyes of the regional reformers were solidly fixed on Lombardy. In other case studies that will be considered in the following chapters, the geographical epicentre will shift, reflecting more closely the international dimension of the Order and the city of origin of its industrious actors. Rather than one centre and one periphery, the Order from Malta looked to various centres for spiritual guidance.

The impact that the reformers had on the spiritual development of the Order would only yield a partial picture, one in which somehow a group of sixteen knights living in the *Camerata* were solely responsible for a process that dragged on until well after their death. Just as we cannot talk of a spirituality imposed from on high, much less of one that was exclusively Roman, neither can we cleanly split the members of the Order into two groups: those keen in regard to piety and the obdurate. The support that Romegas had from some of the *Camerata* members is evidence of the complexity of profiling personal piety. Consequently, it would be more worthwhile to look at spiritual regeneration as a negotiated process between various interpretations of holiness and diverse approaches to how it could be achieved. It is similar to what Fra Gio Francesco Abela said regarding Valletta itself: it needed to be equally a convent city and a fortress city; sometimes being more one, and other times more the other. It would

be misleading to present the advent of the counter-reformation orders in the harbour area – the Capuchins, Jesuits, Discalced Carmelites and Oratorians – as an immediate spiritual elixir. Subsequent Grand Masters faced criticism for not doing enough, or sometimes for doing too much.<sup>246</sup> Even though he was writing about the Jesuits during the same time period, Flavio Rurale neatly summed up these problems in a definition that could hardly be worded better if applied to the Hospitallers as well:

“His men tended to move, in truth, according to varying loyalties – despite coherent with the same vision of a world that placed faith and the necessity of eternal salvation at the heart of human preoccupations – since many were the patrons who sustained the activities or solicited their presence at their side, from their own *familiars*, in palaces, in the conquered territories, patrons who with the supreme pontiff, undisputed reference point, did not always maintain a relationship exempt from contradictions and conflicts. Who led the *Compagnia* had to deal therefore with such fragmentation of interests, and the fact that the Jesuits [in our case the Hospitallers] operated in different national and regional contexts with strategies oftentimes opposed, being simultaneously present in courts divided in their objectives both internally and externally.”<sup>247</sup>

Rurale’s mention of the different regional contexts is key to helping us navigate the intricacies of the subject matter. One could think of space as an anthropomorphised actor and consider the influence that space and place had on behaviour, which is what the next chapter will attempt to do.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> In 1639, Grand Master Lascaris faced tumults for giving too much attention to what his Jesuit confessor advised; B.A.V., Vat. Lat.7484, 1-7v; Buttigieg, Emmanuel, ‘Knights, Jesuits, Carnival and the Inquisition’, *The Historical Journal*, 55 (3), 571-596.

<sup>247</sup> Rurale, ‘Le fatiche del Generale Acquaviva’, 119; “*I suoi uomini tendevano a muoversi, in verità, secondo fedeltà plurime – seppure coerenti con una medesima visione del mondo che poneva la fede e il bisogno di salvezza eterna al centro delle preoccupazioni umane – tante quanti erano i patroni che ne sostenevano l’attività o invocavano la loro presenza al proprio fianco, tra i propri familiares, a palazzo, nelle terre di conquista, patroni che non sempre mantenevano con il sovrano pontefice, per tutti indiscusso punto di riferimento, relazioni politiche esenti da contraddizioni e conflitti. Chi governava la Compagnia doveva dunque fare i conti con tale frammentazione di interessi, col fatto che i gesuiti operavano nei differenti contesti nazionali e regionali secondo strategie spesso contrapposte, essendo presenti simultaneamente presso corti (francese, spagnola, austriaca, italiane ...) divise per obiettivi tanto di politica interna come estera.*”

<sup>248</sup> De Silva, Jennifer Mara (ed.) *The Sacralization of Space and Behaviour in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2015)

## Chapter 2 – Sacred Spaces

*'...the production, firstly of a body, and then a face was fundamental in the production of Counter Reformation holiness'<sup>249</sup>*

One can discuss at length what the legacy of the Verdalle magistracy was. There is little doubt that, despite the papal support for his candidature and the impetus received from S. Carlo, the Barnabites, the Jesuits, and the Capuchins, he had his work cut out for him. His elevation to the cardinalate, the only Grand Master from the Maltese period to ever wear the red hat, can be seen as both an endorsement of the Order of St John from the Papacy, as well as added gravitas to Verdalle's authority within the Order itself. Whereas the previous chapter discussed the direct intervention of Carlo Borromeo in the Order as the chief agent of Tridentinism, this chapter shall look at how some of those initiatives continued to inform the gradual spiritual regeneration of the Order, particularly in the creation of spaces within Valletta and elsewhere that helped propagate the Borromean-Tridentine ideal after Borromeo's death. The degree of success of those efforts described previously shall not be examined in terms of percentages of adherents, since it is rather impossible to come up with accurate figures, but rather in terms of the quality of the initiatives taken by our Hospitaller actors, and how far they resonate with this Borromean-Tridentine matrix. Not surprisingly, the Camerata will feature strongly throughout the chapter.

The role that the Order of St John had in sacralising daily life for its members, or in simpler terms, in providing them with a clear path for the salvation of their souls, can be studied through various angles. While the previous chapter discussed the choice of individuals who sought to live apart from the rest to act as moral exemplars, this chapter will focus on spaces that were intended to help frame those models of inspiration within a topographical surrounding, be it real or abstract. The Catholic Church had spent so much energy in reforming

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<sup>249</sup> Hills, Helen, 'The Face is the Mirror of the Soul', *Art History*, Vol. 34, Issue 4 (2008), 569.

the 'body', a big portion of which included its concept of holiness, and through the efforts of important reformers, would continue to do so long after the Council of Trent. In this 'body', the sacred spaces, be they major churches or remote pilgrimage sites, were the 'face' that greeted the faithful. In truth, just as the face is not separate from the body, so is it difficult at times to separate the church that is the sacred space, from the Church that is the institution. The use of the body paradigm as a methodology to explain the Church was taken directly from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians (*1Cor 12: 12-13*) where he compared the Church to the body and the faithful to the limbs, each with different tasks, but together forming one body.<sup>250</sup>

This chapter will consider the Order of St John as both a member of the large body that was the Catholic Church, as well as a *corpus* in its own right, with its member knights and chaplains being the limbs of this body and its sacred spaces as the face that projected an image of the Order outwards. This means that, despite being enrolled in an exclusive organisation, the members of the Order were no less members of the Catholic Church at large, and thus oscillated between being receivers of universal benefits that the Church promoted through the great shrines and pilgrimage sites of Catholicism, while at other times being beneficiaries of a more particular, tailor-made sacrality in the Order's churches. Additionally, some promoters of models of space-centred sanctity propagated a belief that space played a central role in sanctifying the individual. Some even sought to create their own. In each of the case studies that this chapter will present, the role of the Order of St John, or specifically its Grand Master and Council, will vary in degree, however, to remain consistent with the body paradigm, the spiritual utility obtained through the various sacred spaces was considered beneficial to the whole body, irrespective of whether it was the institution or an individual within it who took the initiative.

To give a sense of order and structure to the understanding of sacred spaces, which was far from linear after the Council of Trent, this chapter will present three principal points of analysis. The first will assess what sacred space is meant to do in general, reflecting a post-Tridentine Catholic piety. This will serve as a basis for the two subsequent points, namely,

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<sup>250</sup> "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts forms one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit to form one body...even so the body is not made up of one part but many."

that space provided a platform for a wide spectrum of religious expression and that it reflected the interdependence of universal and particular forms of piety. For each, we will consider examples that relate to the Order of St John or to individuals affiliated with it, along with examples from other centres of Catholic devotion that can add perspective to what was taking place within the Order in Malta, or in its European lands.

The body paradigm is a useful way to think about these points. St Paul himself, who featured regularly in the Order's growing interest in his cult across the early modern period in Malta, used the paradigm to explain things that were immaterial, contested, looked diverse from every angle, and did not follow a linear evolution. The medieval concept of a *Corpus Christianum* or *Christiana Republica*, a reference to both the universal Church and in our case the convent-island of Malta as a homogenous body, was still the prevalent way of defining some sort of spiritual unity across space. Irrespective of all the divisions existent in the early modern city, not least in Hospitaller Valletta, the early modern faithful aspired to see their city through God's eyes. Rituals, particularly processions, and prayers for intercession, sought to highlight the unity of the body to atone for the sins of one limb or another. The sense of community, be it one governed by a set of rules like a confraternity or one simply made up of individuals with a shared experience, such as the people on a galley, is therefore an intrinsic part of what constitutes sacrality in space.

### ***Theorizing Sacred Space***

*'We read about sacred spaces. We talk about sacred spaces. We encounter, interact with or simply pass by sacred spaces in our daily life. We generally have no problem in identifying sacred spaces. When it comes to define the concept— 'sacred space'—however, things change.'*<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Della Dora, Veronica, *Engaging Sacred Space: Experiments in the Field*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 35:2 (2011), 165.

It is not surprising to think that historians cannot claim to be the only ones seeking to understand and define sacred space. The wide impact of theorizing about the sacred, be it present or past, has naturally attracted many geographers, sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers to contribute to the 'spatial turn', some venturing into the study of the past for answers. This has invariably resulted in a myriad of concepts and ideas that cross over from one field to another, with the potential of creating confusion or misunderstandings when terminology or ideas are taken outside the fertile grounds of their originally intended fields. That said, understanding and defining sacred space is so elusive that one cannot help but borrow terms from other fields of scholarly research that can help make things clearer.<sup>252</sup> There are two provisos in this: that the concept borrowed is used in adherence to the spirit of its creator's intentions or otherwise in a similar context, and secondly, that modern concepts are not projected over historical ones, but act simply as tools to explain elaborate ideas in a language that is easier to grasp for the modern reader.

The term 'Sacred Space' was first coined by Mircea Eliade in his 1959 work *The Sacred and the Profane*, in which he defined the sacred as a combination of space and time.<sup>253</sup> A Catholic example of this would be the belief in the miracle of transubstantiation, the bread and wine that turn into the body and blood of Christ. Catholic churches are oriented around the main altar where this Eucharistic ritual takes place. The belief that Christ's real presence exists in the host is what predominantly determines the sacrality of any Catholic church. Although the ritual recalls Christ's Last Supper, an event that happened only once in time, it exists also simultaneously outside the confines of time, as it is being recreated anew with every mass. The chaplain of the Order, Fra Fabrizio Cagliola, explained that there was even a third level of recollection taking place in the Eucharistic celebration since Christ instituted the Eucharist during the Passover meal, which was held annually by Jews in remembrance of when they were led out of Egypt by Moses.<sup>254</sup> It is hard to miss the association between the sacrificial lamb whose blood marked the Jewish households in Egypt, the impending execution of Christ

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<sup>252</sup> I must thank Prof. Jean-Paul De Lucca, University of Malta, for helping me to navigate the tangled web of concepts and ideas, particularly the ones in my own thoughts.

<sup>253</sup> Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc. 1959); translated from French by Willard Trusk.

<sup>254</sup> A[rchive of the] I[nquisition of] M[alta], Misc. 56; *Istruzioni dei Cappellani, specialmente delle Galere*, (Fra Fabrizio Cagliola), f.322r-324v.



after the Last Supper in Jerusalem, and the fact that both were combined in a ritual that was renewed daily on every altar of every church in the Catholic world.

Catholic belief further maintains that all those who celebrate mass are in communion with each other as if they were partaking in the same meal together, even though they might be physically worlds apart. Space, appropriately embellished, could further enhance this aspect of communion. As an example, we can take a description of a seventeenth-century celebration of the feast of *Corpus Christi* in the slave *bagnos* of Algiers, meticulously studied by Ellen Friedman, as a demonstration of this.<sup>255</sup>

*'They have crosses, banners and flags... the holy sacrament is brought out in a pallium of very fine white damask...on this day [Corpus Christi] the walls of the patio of the sagena,<sup>256</sup> where the procession begins, are decorated with green stalks. In the centre of the sagena they erect triumphal arches, decorated with herbs and flowers... All the captives participate in the procession, carrying candles... A cleric leads... holding an incense box. All walk chanting the hymns appropriate to that day.'*<sup>257</sup>

If not for the reference to captives, one might easily think the above was a description of a procession taking place in any Catholic city in Europe. The captives went to great lengths to observe the universal Catholic ritual on this and other important feast days and creating the right space with the appropriate religious materiality contributed to the creation of what Michel Foucault termed 'heterotopia'.<sup>258</sup> 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single

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<sup>255</sup> Friedman, Ellen G., *Spanish Captives in North Africa in the Early Modern Age* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1983), 83-85; Among the captives were many knights and chaplains of the Order.

<sup>256</sup> The *sagena* was the main courtyard of the slave prison, guarded by four towers. It was the prison's meeting place and adjacent to it was also a small church; Friedman (1983), 62.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 85; quoted from Silvestre, Francisco Antonio, *Fundación histórica de los hospitales que la religion de la Santísima Trinidad...tiene en la ciudad de Argel* (Madrid: Julian Paredes, 1690), 438.

<sup>258</sup> Foucault, Michel, 'Des Espace Autres', lecture delivered on March 1967, translated from French by Jay Miskowiec in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, October 1984. Accessed on 1 March 2023, from: <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible', such as the juxtaposition of a prison and a church.<sup>259</sup>

The space and accompanying ritual served to liberate the soul to be in communion with the rest of the Church, whilst the body was in chains. Through an exercise in imagination, or in this case faith, space is reconceptualised. A prison courtyard in a Muslim city was transformed into a simulacrum of home, whether that home was Malta, Madrid, Messina, or whichever part of the Catholic world they hailed from. The aspect of communion with the Church at large is best illustrated by religious practices on the galleys, in particular the Order's galleys, which were effectively floating parishes.<sup>260</sup> As a parish at sea, the galley represented the allegory of the Church as the Barque of Peter, a boat challenging the waves of adversity on route to eternal salvation, a connection with the diocese on land as a reference point from where the chaplain obtained his authority, as well as a communion with those praying for divine intercession, in convents and churches in multiple places, offering masses and adorations in the hope of the galley's safe return.

On the other hand, the galley distinguishes itself for being, much like a prison, physically set apart, with a clear separation between those onboard and the rest of the world. 'Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.'<sup>261</sup> Edward Soja built on this with what he termed 'Thirdspace', the alternative envisioning of spatiality that deconstructs conventional modes of spatial thinking.<sup>262</sup> The Firstspace is the physically built environment, measurable and tangible. The Secondspace is the conceptual space, conceived as a product of social norms, marketing strategies, education, or faith. The Thirdspace could be a real or imagined space that is lived and experienced. It combines the physicality of the real Firstspace with the expectations generated by the Secondspace. This is in line with what Coster and Spicer identify in several

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>260</sup> Allen, David, 'A Parish at Sea': Spiritual Concerns aboard the Order of St John's Galleys in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, Malcom Barber (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1994), 113-120.

<sup>261</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Des Espaces Autres* (1986 English translation of the 1967 lecture), 24.

<sup>262</sup> Soja, Edward, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); O. Maier, Harry, 'Soja's Thirdspace, Foucault's Heterotopia and de Certau's Practice: Time-Space and Social Geography in Emergent Christianity', *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (145), Space/Time Practices and the Production of Space and Time (2013), 76-92.

early modern European case studies,<sup>263</sup> that the importance of human experience is at the heart of what defines a sacred space, be it a physical location or a set of cognitive associations.<sup>264</sup> Whilst this chapter will deal mostly with Firstspaces and Secondspaces, the following chapters will delve deeper into the ‘real and imagined’ spaces.

John Eade and Michael Sallnow gave more importance to the contested discourses that characterise each sacred space, as opposed to the space being a passive environment.<sup>265</sup> What these works have in common is that they all agree on one thing: space is not merely place and therefore there is more than what meets the eye. It is charged with meaning and a spiritual power that could be harnessed, much like ‘waterfalls are harnessed by hydroelectric plants’, adds Michel de Certeau.<sup>266</sup> De Certeau distinguishes between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’, the former being the intended use of an object or place, and the latter the social use for it, which is sometimes subverted and diverges from the original intended use of that object or place. Turning his attention to ‘Walking in the City’, de Certeau highlights how an entity might produce a map to give the impression of the city as a unified whole. Just like an individual walking the street, however, some might choose to take shortcuts and stray from the map’s suggested path. ‘The desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it. Medieval or Renaissance painters represented the city as seen in a perspective that no eye had yet enjoyed. This fiction already made the medieval spectator into a celestial eye... makes the complexity of the city readable and immobilizes its opaque mobility into a transparent text’.<sup>267</sup>

Just like the Christian *bagno* in Algiers was a heterotopia, so too were the Muslim bagnos in Valletta, Vittoriosa, and Senglea, which were complete with mosques where slaves were

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<sup>263</sup> *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005).

<sup>264</sup> Nelson, Eric, ‘The Parish in its Landscape: Pilgrimage Processions in the Archdeaconry of Blois, 1500-1700’, *French History*, Vol. 24, Issue 3 (September 2010), 320

<sup>265</sup> Tingle, Elizabeth, *Sacred journeys in the Counter-Reformation. Long-distance pilgrimage in northwest Europe* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 13.

<sup>266</sup> De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (California: California U.P., 1984), 178.

<sup>267</sup> De Certeau, 92.

equally free to hold Muslim prayers,<sup>268</sup> were heterotopias that disrupted the homogeneity of the Catholic *Corpus*. As Godfrey Wettinger argues:

‘perspective vision and prospective vision constitute the twofold projection of an opaque past and an uncertain future onto a surface that can be dealt with. They inaugurate (in the sixteenth century) the transformation of the urban fact into the concept of a city.’<sup>269</sup>

If looked at from high up, the urban facts, that are the heterotopias and Thirdspaces, products of a diverse and contested reality, suddenly become opaque and blended in a more homogenous surrounding. In Grand Master Verdalle’s *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, a map of Valletta is accompanied by the caption: VALLETTAE CIVITAS MONTE REPLETA, which translates in literal terms to Valletta being full, but in actual terms translates better to being unified and complete. Indeed, it was far from being complete, without a clear distinction between what was built and what was projected, shown together for the sake of homogeneity.

### ***Visions of a New Jerusalem – The Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (1588)***

Despite all his efforts to reform the Order, Verdalle also faced some of the same accusations levied against his predecessor, La Cassiere. On one occasion in 1593, Fra Ambrosio Gioeni,<sup>270</sup> Fra Bernardino Scaglia,<sup>271</sup> and Fra Centoro Cagnolo<sup>272</sup> presented a scathing report to Pope Clement VIII, accusing Verdalle of negligence on all fronts.<sup>273</sup> The accusations were many, but

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<sup>268</sup> Wettinger, Godfrey, *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo, c.1000-1812* (Malta: PEG, 2002), 58, 445-446 ; There was an unwritten rule between Christians and Muslims in lieu of religious freedom allowed to the slaves. In 1725, the Bey of Tunis closed three churches and the Grand Master retaliated by closing the slaves’ mosque in Malta until the matter was resolved. Eventually in the eighteenth century the Muslim community was even allowed to build a new mosque in Marsa, far more apt for religious services than the spaces they had at the *bagnos*.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>270</sup> Prior of Pisa, from Catania, joined in 1554; Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 94-95.

<sup>271</sup> Prior of Capua, from Ivrea, joined in 1541; *ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>272</sup> Bailiff of St Eufemia, from Vercelli, joined in 1550; *ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>273</sup> A.A.V., S.S. *Malta*, Vol. 3, f.2-13, with reply from the Order’s Ambassadors at f.14-27, and copies of the same at f.53-59. The report by Gueni, Scaglia and Cagnolo and the Ambassador’s reply were published in full by Palma, *Il Frate Cavaliere*, Appx. 1, 241-; Dal Pozzo (1703), 355-359.

we shall limit ourselves to ones that relate to the themes at the heart of the Borromean method, namely penance, the sacrality of the divine office, relics and the sacraments, as well as the doctrinal preparation of novices. The accusations were centred around the observance, or rather the lack of observance of the Statutes of the Order. This means that, contrary to previous similar instances, there was a consensus in regard to spiritual direction, given by the Chapters General convened by Verdalle himself (1583 and 1588), but some claimed this path was not being followed. For instance, they complained that most knights were not confessing and receiving communion on feast days as decreed by the Statutes. Some other knights were not even attending High Mass, vespers and processions on the solemn days either. They suggested that the Grand Master himself at times did not fast during Lent or invited other knights to play dice and card games instead. They acknowledged the vitality of certain decisions taken by the Chapter General of 1583, such as the provision of a sacristy and a chapel of relics,<sup>274</sup> the building of a house for conventual chaplains where sacred literature could be read to them, that all priests not yet ordained in the Order should be made to attend the seminary, and of the importance of administering the sacraments, particularly in the Hospital. Yet regrettably, according to these three elderly Italian knights, none of these good directives had been enacted.<sup>275</sup>

In the 1590s, individuals within the Order continued to misbehave even after huge efforts were made to rectify the flagrant abuses of the 1570s; but this was not necessarily a failure of the efforts to reform. As the previous chapter concluded, Valletta towards the end of the century was a work-in-progress in every sense of the word. Fra Cagnolo lived long enough to write yet another similar letter in 1611, that time against Grand Master Wignacourt, who as we shall see further on, was also a keen reformer of the Order.<sup>276</sup> It is difficult to know

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<sup>274</sup> A Tolo, or a repository chapel for relics, was built in 1598, paid for by the Bailiff of Maiorca Fra Raimondo de Veri; Dal Pozzo (1703), 400.

<sup>275</sup> A.A.V., S.S. Malta, Vol. 3, f.2-13.

<sup>276</sup> *"In Convento si gioca pubblicamente e chi tiene il giuoco contribuisce una provisione ad un nepote del Gran Maestro, come è notorio, se bene Sua Signoria Illustrissima finse voler castigar a li giocatori. Il duello è così familiare e si permette come se fosse opera di merito. Si è dato l'habito ad alcuni senza finirsi il noviziato, che è [...] contra il Sacro Concilio. Il clero vilipende, la giurisdizione ecclesiastica viene avilita. A diaconi non si tiene il maestro di grammatica, né si da commodità di studiare, acciò non riescano intendenti e di spirito per haver sempre un Prior generale della Chiesa che non conosca la sua eminente condizione e non ardisca procedere et usare la sua auttorità ecclesiastica, et è pure strano ch'una religione christiana tenga le persone sacre in così poca stima et in tanto humile e sprezzata condizione"*, 3 August 1611, A.A.V., S.S. Malta, Vol. 106, c. 135r., op.cit. Russo, *Un'Ordine, Una Città, Una Diocesi*, 108.

whether Cagnolo, Scaglia, and Gioeni had ulterior motives, as the reply prepared by the Order's ambassadors seems to indicate.<sup>277</sup> This petition reflects clearly how divergent and, at times, outright contradictory the sources are when it comes to spiritual reform, resisting any attempts to pass judgement on the degree of success that the initiatives had. Wietse de Boer expressed the same consideration with regard to Borromeo's Milan, stressing that one should not confuse the ideal, linear and ordered, with the social reality, which is generally all but linear.<sup>278</sup> Nevertheless, the Statutes to which Cagnolo, Scagli, and Gioeni referred can be taken to represent this ideal, a way-forward for Hospitaller spirituality upon which there was enough consensus.

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<sup>277</sup> A.A.V. S.S. Malta, Vol. 3, f.14-27; Dal Pozzo (1703), 355-359.

<sup>278</sup> De Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul*, 180-182.



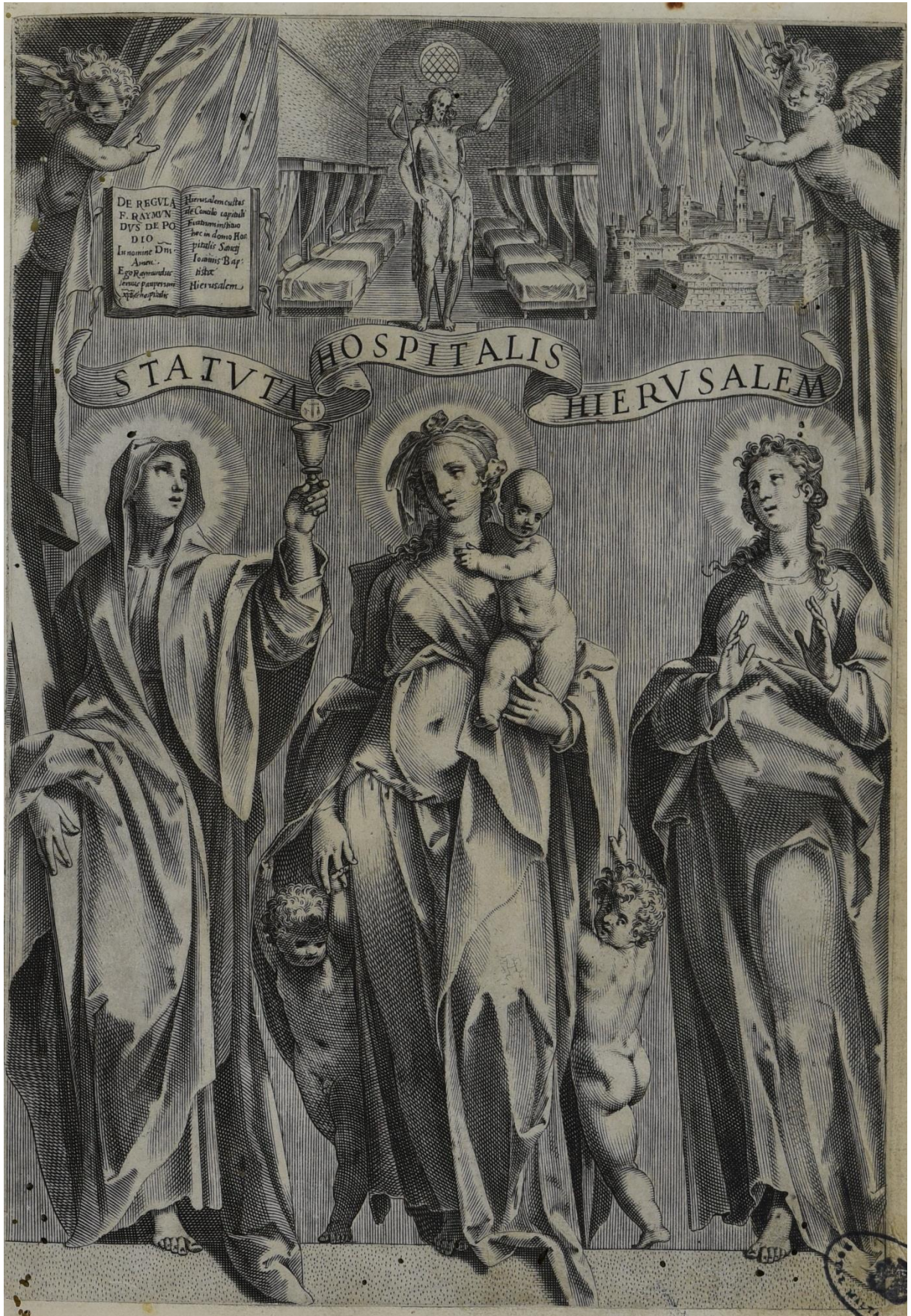


Figure 4: Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (1588), Thomassin, Cesari [Frontispiece], Courtesy: National Library of Malta



For the sake of posterity, the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (Statutes of the Hospital of Jerusalem) were printed in Rome in 1588 as a concrete by-product of two Chapters General held since Verdalle's election, so much anticipated by the knights who had sought the help of Carlo Borromeo and the Pope. Despite the clear goals, which seem to have temporarily alleviated the problem of a lapse in direction, the Statutes lacked a precise timeline for when the Order would pass from decree to action, prompting criticism. On the other hand, the 1588 *Statuta* convey the hope of the Hospitaller Order, particularly in Valletta, to achieve a likeness to the perfect holiness exemplified by the heavenly Jerusalem. The production of such a clear document that was also agreeable to the Grand Master's own critics, is arguably Verdalle's greatest achievement as Grand Master. The work was made complete with the inclusion of a series of illustrations, the quality and detail of which have attracted the attention of specialists of the Order of St John just as much as the written contents.

The plates, produced in Rome by Philippe Thomassin (1562–1622) on the designs of the famous Giuseppe Cesari *il Cavalier d'Arpino* (1568–1640),<sup>279</sup> are deeply imbued with symbols, mottos and other pictorial references, that at times make the viewer wonder whether they were addendums to the texts, or whether it was the other way round. The references to Jerusalem are not hard to decipher, etched in the frontispiece as a heavenly vision being unveiled by a putto, right on top of the corresponding '*Hierusalem*' in the title, crowning the personification of the three cardinal virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity (*Fig.4*). Three centuries had passed since the Order lost its last foothold in the Holy Land, with little to no hope of ever returning.

Yet even though, from the sixteenth century, one frequently encounters the appellative *Religione di Malta* in diplomatic dispatches, the *Statuta* convey the renewed centrality of the Jerusalemite allegory to the process of reform and renewal. Furthermore, the illustrations in the *Statuta* prove that space and place are indeed a most helpful methodology to navigate the intricacies of the diverse contexts that conditioned Hospitaller thought and behaviour, including their spirituality. Buttigieg's analysis of the use of imagery as part of the Verdalle's

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<sup>279</sup> Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith, Masculinity*, 56.



power-politics makes a passing reference to buildings, palaces, and rituals,<sup>280</sup> and possibly the same rationale could be applied also to understanding the symbiosis between space, faith, and the Order's vocation. Thomassin's plates could indeed be grouped by places and spaces, which include palace halls, churches and monasteries, commanderies, the hospital, an enemy fortress being besieged, as well as scenes of Valletta. A map of Malta during the siege and a plan of Valletta, both seen from God's perspective, serve to reinforce the fact that the gaze of God never turned away from the Order's activities.

The Grand Master's authority, which on a few of the plates is given Verdalle's own likeness, was as much the culmination of a long succession of leaders going back to the Order's founders in the Holy Land,<sup>281</sup> as it was God-given. The temporal powers of ruler and arbiter are flanked by the spiritual ones, unequivocally represented in two scenes by the Holy Spirit in the shape of the white dove, one showing the election of a new Master and the other the passing of judgment on two knights. God the Father is furthermore shown in the title page to the sequence of portraits of Grand Masters, showering with graces a scroll with the words 'EFFIGIES MAGISTROR HOSPITALIS', surrounded by a choir of angels. Additionally, the Holy Trinity can also be observed in the plate representing the Rule of De Puy, with the Master pointing to allegories of faith, hope and charity with one hand and indicating a heavenly scene with the other, as if to say to a group of knights gathered around him that the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were the one true path to salvation. The scene is enclosed in a cornice that rests upon two helical columns, suggestive of both the Solomonic Temple of Jerusalem as well as the emergent style of Roman baroque architecture. The columns are furthermore decorated with scenes from the life of St John, considered by the Order to be, like Christ, the physical embodiment of virtue.

The predella, or bottom section of the cornice invokes a scene with the Order's pharmacy and hospital, a reminder of the organisation's original and uninterrupted activity since the Holy Land. Alongside Jerusalem and Valletta, Rome is also present in two plates, both showing Pope Sixtus V with Grand Master Verdalle. Apart from the obvious political statement that

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<sup>280</sup> Buttigieg, Emmanuel, 'Politics and Power in Grand Master Verdalle's *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588)', *Politics and Power, The Military Orders Vol.5*, Peter Edbury (ed.) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 156.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

subtly reminded the knights of the circumstances that had led to Rome's intervention in Verdalle's appointment, the two scenes represent an aspiration to have a central reference point in the papacy. In 1596 Inquisitor Innocenzo Del Bufalo (1595-98) recommended that a new Chapter General be convened in Rome "because they are in need of the supreme hand of Your Holiness", rather than in Malta, saying that only eighteen knights were needed to hold it and that he himself could participate as the Pope's delegate to present some points.<sup>282</sup> Geographical proximity was therefore considered to be a central factor in control and reform.

Traces of Borromeo's Milan will become harder to identify, gradually becoming absorbed by a more centralised Roman imprint. The only undeniable vestiges of the strong Borromean direction that eventually resulted in the statutes themselves, is the central presence of altars in some of the scenes of the *Statuta Hospitalis*. The prominence of a central altar as the focal point of Catholic churches, elevated along with the presbytery by means of a few steps, was one of the many innovations introduced by Borromeo in the edification and decoration of churches as a means of reinforcing the Eucharistic centrality in both ritual and meditation. The impact of Borromeo's 1577 *Instructiones Fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*<sup>283</sup> on the *Statuta* is further enhanced by the depiction of tabernacles,<sup>284</sup> in one instance (the reception of nuns) (*Fig.5*) with the Eucharist in exposition under a canopied ciborium, placed by the artist precisely at the vanishing point of the scene, thus directing the eye towards it. This is best illustrated in the Hospital scene with rows of beds under a vaulted ceiling forming a space akin to a church nave, with an altar at the very end elevated by steps, precisely as Borromeo decreed.<sup>285</sup> (*Fig.6*) The altars in the investiture of knights panel, and the Hospital panel, both

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<sup>282</sup> A.A.V., S.S. Malta, Vol.5, f.190; 4 June 1596: "Questa Religione per esser da molti anni in qua trascorsa senza alcuna rivista, et riforma venuta dalla Sede Apostolica, ha bisogno grandemente della suprema mano di Sua Santità, per esser ritenuta, et confirmata, accio affatto non si perda, come veramente va caminando...debba ordinare che si tenga Capitolo Generale in Roma, il che non s'è incommodo, ne spesa grande, poiche come si vede mentre tratto del Capitolo Generale diciotto persone solamente sono necessarie....per quattro capi principali che si dovrebbero trattare, cioe la publica inosservanza di voti, circa le elettione del G.Mro, le priminenze usurpate, et administratione di giustitia, et molte altre cose..."

<sup>283</sup> Borromeo, Carlo, *Instructiones Fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577), English transl. Evelyn C. Voelker, 1977. Accessed on 27 January 2023, from: <http://evelynvoelker.com/>; De Silva, 11; Ditchfield, 'Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism ...', 18; Sénécal, Robert, 'Carlo Borromeo's Instructiones Fabricae Et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae and Its Origins in the Rome of His Time', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 2000, Vol. 68 (2000), 241-267.

<sup>284</sup> "It is proper that some instruction be given here on the subject of the tabernacle, since a provincial decree has made it obligatory to put the tabernacle on the high altar.", Voelker, 35.

<sup>285</sup> "Moreover, if there is room in front of and at the sides [of the altar], three steps will be built, and that is one consisting of the footpace and two others below."; Voelker, 31.

have a crucifixion scene as their titular. Nevertheless, the real altars in the main hospital hall were consecrated to St John the Baptist and the Holy Trinity and not the Passion of Christ, which indicates that the crucifixion scene is possibly another reference to Borromeo's *Instructiones*: 'A cross with the image of the crucified Christ will be properly placed under the arch of the vault of the main chapel, in every church, especially a parish church.'<sup>286</sup> The canopies or *capocieli* are also a detail envisaged by Borromeo to protect the altar from dust and give it a greater sense of sacrality:

'The individual altars, including the space occupied by the celebrating priest, which are not completely covered by a vault or a coffered ceiling, or with a vault that is so high that it cannot be easily and often cleaned, will also be protected by a baldachin known as *capocielo*... The baldachin, whether of wood or cloth, will be suspended by iron chains attached to the ceiling or the wall, or by some other solid structure. Whatever the case, it will be large enough to completely cover the altar and the priest celebrating Mass, so as to protect both from dust and any dirt that may fall from up high.'<sup>287</sup>

The Eucharistic presence is also the subject of the procession to St John's church panel, as a prelude to the section on the Church statutes, which features what looks like the procession of *Corpus Domini*. The Prior of the Conventual Church is shown holding an ostensory, under a baldachin, escorted by knights holding candles. (*Fig. 7*)

Tridentine Rome and Carlo Borromeo influenced each other in turn, and therefore it should not be surprising that the distinction was becoming equally blurred in Hospitaller standards as well. Robert Sénécal argued that the practice of awarding titular churches to cardinals in Rome, coupled with the reinvigorated spirit of architectural expression of the new charismas and spiritualities emerging from the Counter-Reformation, served as a canvas where the individual cardinals and patrons could experiment with ways and means of translating Catholic teaching into space.<sup>288</sup> Borromeo himself had his titular churches of Santa Prassade and San Martino ai Monti in mind when elaborating on some of these strategies during his

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<sup>286</sup> Voelker, 31.

<sup>287</sup> Voelker, 45.

<sup>288</sup> See: Sénécal.

visit for the 1575 Jubilee.<sup>289</sup> As a Cardinal of the Church, Grand Master Verdalle was also given a titular church in Rome, which, alongside Hospitaller churches and St John's in Valletta, provided a space where to implement (or disregard) these guidelines. As part of his Cardinalate, Verdalle was made titular of the church of Santa Maria in Portico Campitelli in Rione S. Angelo, and among some structural works he ordered in 1590, he paid for the gilding of the Apse

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<sup>289</sup> Sénécal, 253.





Figure 5: Reception of Nuns, *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588), Thomassin, Cesari, Courtesy: National Library of Malta





Figure 6: View of the Sacra Infermeria, *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588), Thomassin, Cesari, marked with one-point perspective to show the tabernacle and crucifix as placed by the artist precisely at the vanishing point.





Figure 7: Corpus Christi Procession in Valletta, *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588), Thomassin, Cesari,

above the main altar.<sup>290</sup> On his way to Malta from Rome, following his elevation to Cardinal, the Grand Master passed through Messina where he observed that the commandery church of St John in that city was in need of repairs. He commissioned the Prior of Messina, Fra Rinaldo di Naro, to do the necessary works and decorations, which included the transfer of the main altar to a more central location.<sup>291</sup> During the works, the lost remains of St Placido, Eutichio, Vittorino, and Flavia were discovered.<sup>292</sup> Similar works were carried out in other commanderies as well, although the adherence to this *miglioramento* seems to have relied more on the discretion of the commander, and no magisterial demand seems to have been issued. In the commandery of San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini for instance, Florence, the relocation of the main altar took place in 1616 at the expense of the commander Fra Francesco dell'Antella.<sup>293</sup>

Female spirituality has so far been conspicuously absent from this dissertation, a lacuna that this study will only address in the matter of female models of sanctity. Suffice to say that it merits an entire study of its own, seeing how the cloistered reality of the female members had its own separate rules, experienced a different kind of reform, and varied greatly from *langue* to *langue* in the absence of a centralised structure that mirrored their male counterpart. Nevertheless, the *Statuta Hospitalis* are a reminder that a parallel exercise was taking place in the reform of female everyday life, and yet another of Borromeo's influences who was a keen reformer also in this sphere. As the plates illustrate, Verdalle was equally enthusiastic about the establishment of new female Hospitaller communities and the consolidation of older ones. During his magistracy, he founded the Monastery of St Ursola, first in Vittoriosa and then transferred to Valletta.<sup>294</sup> In 1589, he also approved a new Constitution for the Monastery of San Giovannino in Florence.<sup>295</sup> A small, almost trivial, detail

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<sup>290</sup> Erra, Carlo Antonio, *Storia dell'immagine, e chiesa di Santa Maria in Portico di Campitelli* (Roma, Komarek, 1750), 30.

<sup>291</sup> Gatto, Simona, 'Grandiose feste nella città di Messina tra il XVI e XVIII sec.' *Journal of Baroque Studies* Vol 1(2), 2014, 103-124

<sup>292</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 316; Minutolo, Andrea, *Memorie del Gran Priorato di Messina raccolte da Fra Don Andrea Minutolo* (Messina: Vincenzo d'Amico, 1699), 5; Costanzo, Giuseppe Buonfiglio, *Prima Parte dell'Historia Siciliana* (Venezia: Bonifacio Ciera, 1603), 660-661.

<sup>293</sup> Sebregondi Fiorentini, Ludovica, *San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini a Firenze* (Firenze: Edifir, 2005), 106.

<sup>294</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 243-244.

<sup>295</sup> A.O.M. 1970, f.133: *Constitutioni del Monasterio di S. Gio Battista di Fiorenza dell'Ordine Giero. Spedite li 20 di Maggio 1589*; Dal Pozzo (1703), 316.



in the Constitution of San Giovannino illustrates the perfect connection between image and text, as it describes exactly what Thomassin and Cesari represented in the *Statuta* plates: ‘*Entrando in choro pigliaranno l’acqua benedetta...*’ (Upon entering the choir they will take the holy water).<sup>296</sup> The investiture of nuns plate shows precisely this detail of a nun touching the holy water font, placed on the right-hand side of the altar as Borromeo instructed (Figure 5).<sup>297</sup> There is no titular painting behind the altar, but instead one notices a grate which resonates with another of Borromeo’s recommendations:

‘There shall not be a main chapel, but a transverse wall, which divides the innermost part of the church from the outer one where the priest celebrates mass. The altar should abut this transverse wall, at the centre of the wall... A window will be set into the transverse wall, in view of the altar, from which the nuns can see and hear the mass.’<sup>298</sup>

Opposite the holy-water font, to the left side of the altar is another detail described by the *Instructiones – a rota*. ‘In the transverse wall between the inner and outer church, on the side of the nuns’ sacristy, there will be an opening, with a *rota* through which the vestments needed for celebrating the Holy Mass may be passed.’<sup>299</sup>

Using the Statutes of 1588 as a roadmap, and on the strength of the context and spiritual language that was defined by Borromeo and refined by the Jesuits during Acquaviva’s generalate,<sup>300</sup> we can proceed to consider how, in concrete terms, the Order addressed the creation of Jerusalem in Valletta. Apart from the unclear distinction between what was strictly Milanese influence and what gradually became a more Roman expression, the late 1580s and the decades that follow, account also for a stronger Jesuit influence owing to the Camerata turning to them for guidance, as well as the establishment of the Jesuit College in Valletta. The product of the Borromeo-Jesuit variant in the spirituality that the Camerata proposed

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<sup>296</sup> A.O.M. 1970, f.137.

<sup>297</sup> ‘It [holy water font] will be placed not without, but within the church, in sight of those entering, if possible, on the right side’, Voelker, 79.

<sup>298</sup> Voelker, 109.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Claudio Acquaviva promoted a return to the Ignatian meditative method, the first step of which was the *compositio loci* (awareness of space); Malý, Tomáš, ‘The Logic of Jesuit Meditations: Antoine Sucquet’s *Via vitae aeternae* (1620)’, *Acta Comeniana* 30, LIV (2016), 158.

bore its fruits around the same time that Borromeo himself was canonised (1610). Though the Hospitaller historian Dal Pozzo mentioned the Camerata in conjunction with the greatest achievements of the Verdalle Magistracy, the Barnabite letters and the activities of knights such as Fra Categliano Casati clearly demonstrate that the Camerata had been operating for a few years before Verdalle was elected, and more than a decade before the opening of the Jesuit College. Furthermore, Fra Casati played a vital role in promoting the establishment of the Jesuit College,<sup>301</sup> after the remaining Barnabites were recalled.<sup>302</sup> He was also the procurator of the Magdalene nuns and the nuns of the monastery of St Catherine, both involved in pastoral work with prostitutes and orphans.<sup>303</sup>

At the time of Maletta's letter to Borromeo in 1582, this work was mentioned, even though neither monastery had yet been officially instituted. This proves that the knights of the Camerata were the ones to sow the seed for *repentite* monasteries in Malta. The Magdalene monastery was originally an annexe of the Ursuline one mentioned above but was later transferred next door to the house of the Camerata in 1609,<sup>304</sup> in proximity to the Sacra Infermeria, another of the key buildings. Geographical proximity is an important feature to consider when attempting to understand Hospitaller charitable activities in Valletta. Moreover, the organisation of space comes across very clearly in the dispatches of Inquisitor Innocenzio dal Bufalo (1595-98) to the Holy See in which he discusses the two monasteries, that of the *Convertite* (Magdalenes) and that of the *Vergini* (St Ursola).<sup>305</sup> Del Bufalo wrote of the need for the monastery to be '*in isola*',<sup>306</sup> a turn of phrase that makes a greater impact in

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<sup>301</sup> Incidentally, the Jesuit contingent was led by a Padre Pietro Casati, but it is not clear whether Padre Casati was a relative of Fra Cateliano; Dal Pozzo (1703), 340-341; Cateliano was the first procurator of the Jesuit College; Archives of St Lawrence Collegiate Church (Vittoriosa, Malta), Santo Ufficio Cartolario, Vol.6, P.2, f.221.

<sup>302</sup> Epistolario Generalizio dei Barnabiti, 2 June 1586; "...Iddio sa cio che la Congregazione pati per la forza che ci fu fatta l'altra volta, ma ora speriamo nella loro Bonta, che s'acquetereanno..."; This letter is particularly valuable as it is the earliest documented reference to the knights in the retreat house as "*signori cavalieri della Camerata*".

<sup>303</sup> By 1606, he was also a procurator for the Monastery of St Catherine in Valletta; Dal Pozzo (1703), 523.

<sup>304</sup> On the history of the Magdalene nuns, see: Muscat, Christine, *Magdalene Nuns and Penitent Prostitutes, Valletta* (Malta: BDL Publ., 2013).

<sup>305</sup> A.A.V., S.S. *Malta*, Vol.5 (1593-97) f.120 (3 September 1596); the Inquisitor talks about the great number of prostitutes in Valletta and how some of them have been received in the *Monastero delle Convertite* which was being built. He mentions that the said monastery needed a greater income, presumably to accommodate more converted prostitutes, and in this regard, he spoke to the Grand Master who immediately asked Giacomo Bosio to make a case to the Papacy for more money.

<sup>306</sup> A.A.V., S.S. *Malta*, Vol.5, f.147.

Italian when one considers that this entailed a sort of triple insularity – *un’isola, nella città monte-penisola, capitale di una isola* - a heterotopia if there ever was one.

### ***The Sacra Infermeria***

The sections that follow will take a closer look at some of the spaces represented in the *Statuta* in order to compare the ideal with the real. The care that the Order of St John offered to the sick and the poor is the most constant element in its pluri-centennial history, and at the heart of all this was the main hospital complex,<sup>307</sup> the *Sacra Infermeria*. The medical aspect of the Hospital has often been a point of interest for many scholars,<sup>308</sup> particularly since the service offered by the Order already stands out when compared to Western practices. Nevertheless, reading most of these scholarly works on the medical history of the Order and the evolving concept of the *Xenodocheum*, the first Hospital in Jerusalem, into the Hospitals in Acre, Rhodes, Birgu, and Valletta, one often gets the impression that the ‘sacred’ aspect in the name is a formality, a sort of transmissible title that passed on from one edifice to the next, and few have ever questioned what was so holy about the hospital, compared to other hospitals of the time. The Holy Infirmary, which was itself consecrated in its entirety to the Holy Trinity much like a church would be<sup>309</sup> invites us to dig deeper into the true understanding of spirituality in conjunction with service to the community.

The particularities in the understanding of what is sacred, emerge when one studies how political, social, and religious communities overlap in a particular city or region. In line with this, Simone Laqua-O’Donnell proposes a paradigm that looks like a ripple effect in water,<sup>310</sup> concentric circles composed of a particular group of people within a specific setting, say a confraternity of conventual chaplains serving in the Infirmary, that in turn functions alongside

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<sup>307</sup> The Order had many other Hospitals; as a rule of thumb they had at least one in every Priory. Along pilgrimage routes such as the French way to Santiago Compostela, they had a hospital or rather hospice in every commandery.

<sup>308</sup> For instance: Cassar, Paul, *The Medical History of Malta* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1964).

<sup>309</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.33.

<sup>310</sup> Laqua-O’Donnell, Simone, ‘Catholic Piety and Community’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, Bamji, Janssen and Laven (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2016), 282.

other services that a larger community – the Order of St John – offers from their Conventual hub in the city of Valletta.<sup>311</sup>

Like space, community is a complex term; from families to religious groups, communities can also be abstract, imagined, or supra-regional. The term is often used for people who share language, culture, space, ideas, or common purpose amongst other things. Who participated in a community is just as important as knowing who was excluded from it, and why. It is also important to point out that early modern communities assigned importance to distinctions of birth, rank, and status. The Rule of the Hospital<sup>312</sup> indicates that a great number of individuals passed through the corridors of the Infirmary daily, who had different tasks and different responsibilities, including diverse spiritual obligations. The place where people sat at the table, how they spent their time and, more importantly, where they were buried had a great significance.<sup>313</sup> Since spaces reflect communities, we can talk of ‘spaces-within-spaces’ much in the same way that we talk about communities; spaces that overflow and interact with each other.

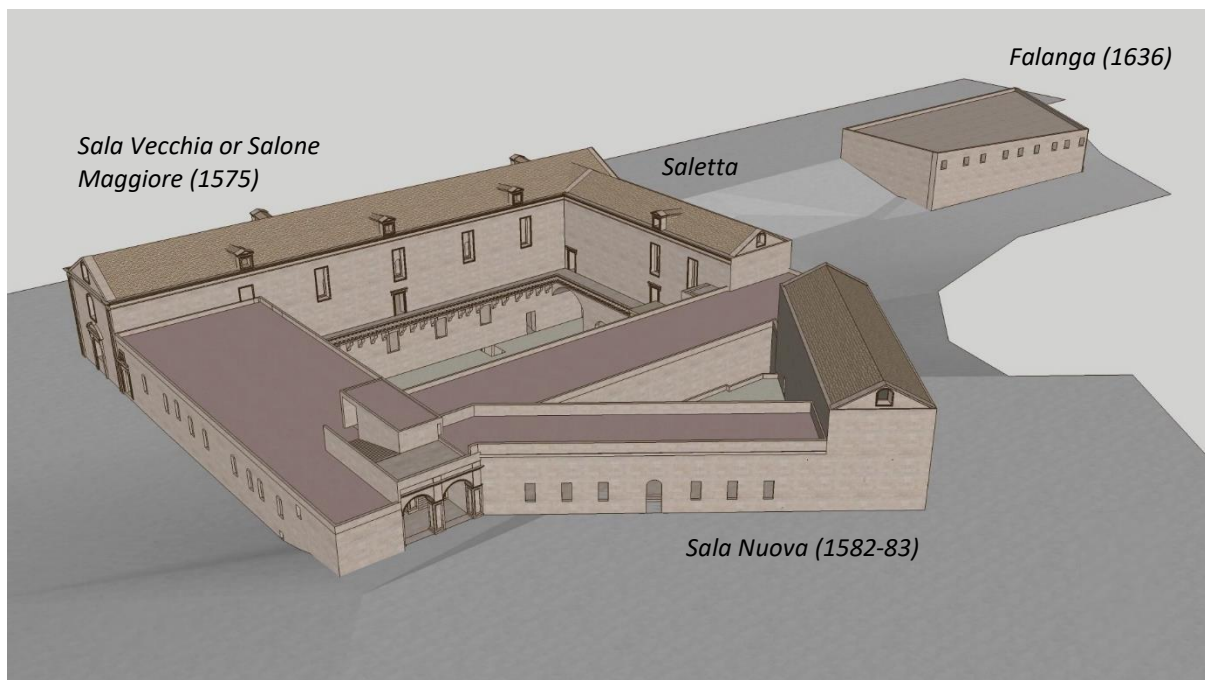


Figure 8: Elevation of the Sacra Infermeria ca.1636, featuring the old ward built by La Cassiere, the Saletta, and the Falanga, for infectious diseases. Credit- Christian Mifsud

<sup>311</sup> A similar metaphor is used by Griffiths, Paul, ‘Overlapping circles: imagining criminal communities in early modern London’ in *Communities in Early Modern England: Network, Place, Rhetoric*, Alexandra Shepard et al. (eds.) (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 2000), 115.

<sup>312</sup> N.L.M., MS. 377.

<sup>313</sup> O’Donnell, 282.

To introduce the physical space of the Valletta hospital, I will first give a brief overview of the areas reserved specifically for the religious cult. As mentioned above, the entire premises of the *Sacra Infermeria* were consecrated ground, meaning that its halls, the pharmacy, the medical school, the stores and even the kitchens were as much hallowed ground as its chapels and its cemetery. This also meant that the hospital offered ecclesiastical immunity, extending sanctuary privileges that were generally restricted to churches. In descriptions and rules of the Holy Infirmary, the consecration of the Hospital was always brought up as the very first point,<sup>314</sup> stressing that for the Order, the Hospital was a religious duty, rather than a necessary secular obligation of the state to provide healthcare options for the inhabitants of the island. The blanket consecration of the grounds could provide a short answer to “what made the *Sacra Infermeria* holy?”, but that would only be scraping the surface. Once we acknowledge the indelible relationship between spaces and communities, certain structural features that are integral to one’s spiritual well-being make more sense. The descriptions mention that every hall had its own altar for the celebration of liturgy, with the main one being the altar of St John the Baptist in the *Salone Maggiore*, where the Holy Sacrament was originally held. This altar was singular for Malta, since it had ‘two faces’,<sup>315</sup> meaning that when the Grand Masters Cottoner extended the main hall to join it with the *Falanga* in the second half of the seventeenth century,<sup>316</sup> this altar that must have been at the far end of the old hall, now found itself at the centre of the new one. Instead of removing it, the Order opted to give it another front, facing the newly built extension, in such a way that now mass could be followed by all the bed-ridden patients in the main hall. The main hall was nonetheless given another altar at the far end of the great hall dedicated to the Holy Trinity.<sup>317</sup>

In the *Saletta dei Feriti*, there was an altar dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, patron saints of healers. This altar had a titular painting by Mattia Preti, which was replaced with a copy in 1698 by the Prior Fra Pietro Viani due to excessive damage to the colours that it had

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<sup>314</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.33. Try not to use the footnotes for digressions. If something is worth saying, then it should find itself in the main text.

<sup>315</sup> Scarabelli, Giovanni, *Culto e Devozione dei Cavalieri a Malta* (Malta: University of Malta P., 2004), 39

<sup>316</sup> Ward for infectious diseases.

<sup>317</sup> The altar in the main hall is seen in the illustration of the hospital of the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem (1588)*, and in Osterhausen’s *Eigentlicher und gründlicher Bericht dessen...*(Augsburg: 1649). A later renovated version of it survives to this day.

sustained as a consequence of the smoke in the hall.<sup>318</sup> The original was taken to St John's Conventual Church, whilst Viani commissioned a replacement as part of the renovations of this altar.<sup>319</sup> Other altars included that of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the new ward, St Joseph in the geriatrics ward, and an altar dedicated to the Discovery of the Cross in the stores.<sup>320</sup> Additionally, the complex had two chapels: one for the Blessed Sacrament built by Grand Master Perellos (r.1697-1720) specifically to serve for the viaticum, and another which we shall discuss in more detail further on, that was built by Fra Giorgio Nibbia in the hospital cemetery and dedicated to Our Lady of Compassion (Pietà').<sup>321</sup>

The development of these shrines resembles the architectural growth of the Hospital, in that they were not built all at once, but were generally the result of extensions and alterations to the hospital. Nevertheless, the sheer concentration of places of worship, figuratively under one roof, is only equalled by larger churches such as St John's. It reinforces the idea that every time the Order felt the need to embark on a renovation project in the Hospital, they sought to sacralise the space by adding a shrine with an appropriate dedication; one that reflects the community that would be making use of that shrine, chosen specifically as part of a carefully orchestrated demonstration of ritual. The dedication to St Joseph in the geriatrics ward is a case in point.<sup>322</sup> Tradition held St Joseph as the patron saint of the moribund as it was believed he died of old age in the hands of Jesus himself. The 'Art of Dying Well', to borrow the term used by Roberto Bellarmino,<sup>323</sup> took inspiration from the death of St Joseph for what were considered perfect ways of departing this earth, in the embrace of Christ.<sup>324</sup> The service of helping patients remain steadfast in their faith throughout their suffering was considered even more important than alleviating the suffering itself, as reflected by how attentive and strict the administration of the Hospital was about the care of the souls. Yet before taking a

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<sup>318</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.34.

<sup>319</sup> The original is still in St John's Conventual Church and bears the arms of Fra Pietro Viany, see: Sciberras, Keith, *Mattia Preti, Life and Works* (Malta: Midsea, 2020), 317-318.

<sup>320</sup> A.O.M. 1953, f.201; Scarabelli, 39.

<sup>321</sup> N.L.M., MS. 388

<sup>322</sup> Scarabelli, 39.

<sup>323</sup> Bellarmino, Roberto, *L'arte di ben morire... tradotti in lingua Toscana da Marcello Cervini* (Firenze: Pietro Ceconcelli, 1620).

<sup>324</sup> For a study of the artistic representations of this concept in Malta from the late seventeenth century onwards, see: Attard, Christian, *The Art of Dying Well, Visual culture in times of piety and plague in Malta* (Malta: Kite Group, 2022).

closer look at the spiritual obligations of the Hospital staff, let us move from the imagery of the embrace of Christ to the iconography of the embrace of Mary, in order to delve deeper into the cult of the Pieta' of Our Lady and the cemetery.

The Pieta' evokes the final scenes from the Passion of Christ, specifically the end of physical suffering for Jesus coupled with the emotional pain of his mother. Therefore, it was such a powerful and significant choice by Fra Giorgio Nibbia for the church in the hospital cemetery, since the Order was symbolically adopting the position of a suffering Mary, pained at the loss of those patients it could not save.<sup>325</sup> That said, the Order's embrace was not merely a symbolic one. Nibbia, and the executors of his testament after his death, made sure that this concern to extend the spiritual embrace beyond the death of a patient, was a concrete, tangible and regulated service offered by the *Sacra Infermeria*. The church that Nibbia paid for was built literally on and around the faithful departed, and reference is made to a door connecting the church to the hospital cemetery and access to a 'carnera' (crypt) beneath the church that also served for the burial of some of those who had died in the hospital.<sup>326</sup>

Fra Giorgio Nibbia went to notary Pietro Paolo Vincella to draw up a will soon after the construction of the church was completed in 1619.<sup>327</sup> He felt compelled to regulate the temporal and spiritual administration of the church he intended to build since spiritual utility could only be obtained if the necessary structures to control devotion were established. This urge to formalise devotion in writing, often with repetitive and formulaic documents as we shall see, expresses the need that the devotees felt to create order in times that were otherwise characterised by social and political instability. The best mechanism to financially secure the continuous religious service in a given shrine was the creation of a Pious Foundation. This consisted of an endowment by the benefactor, generally consisting of property, which could be rented or used in such a way that the proceeds would go to maintain a shrine of his choosing after his death. In the case of Fra Nibbia, he had property in Valletta

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<sup>325</sup> See: Bonello, Giovanni, 'Giorgio Nibbia's Church in Valletta', *Treasures of Malta* 9, 3 (2003), 25-29.

<sup>326</sup> A.O.M. 1953, f.202v.

<sup>327</sup> A copy exists in N.L.M., MS 142, Vol. IV, 61; Nibbia's patronage of this church is documented as early as 1607. This first church was later demolished and a second was built by the Nibbia Foundation in 1731. This second church was partially destroyed during WWII and the ruins dismantled soon after. The sarcophagus which contained the remains of Fra Giorgio Nibbia is one of the last vestiges that is still visible in what is now a parking lot.

close to the Holy Infirmary as well as some more in the vicinity of the *Auberge d'Italie*, the rent from which would finance mass at the cemetery church.<sup>328</sup> This was a fairly common practice in Hospitaller Malta, and the same concept could also be adopted to finance non-religious enterprises.<sup>329</sup>

A *Fondazione Pia* is a valuable tool for understanding the motivation and mechanisms of creating a new sacred space. The premise would be for a benefactor to secure a number of suffrage masses for his soul or those of his family in exchange for a generous donation.<sup>330</sup> Nevertheless, one must not dismiss the whole practice as merely a spiritual *quid-pro-quo*, for the simple reason that the involvement of other individuals, sometimes entire communities resulted in something that affected the devotional fabric in a given location, an impact that goes well beyond the benefactor. Let us consider some of these other people and the conditions with which they were bound according to the notarial deed.

As was already pointed out, one cannot stress enough how important suffrage masses were in early modern Catholic spirituality. Nibbia wanted to employ two priests who would oversee celebrating ten anniversaries each year, seven for himself, his brothers and sisters, two for his parents, and another for his patrons.<sup>331</sup> The chaplains were bound against a penalty of four tari for every day they failed to celebrate mass on any of these anniversaries. Furthermore, they were also requested to celebrate a mass for every knight of the Order who died, on the same day if he were in Malta, or the first possible day if he died abroad. Additionally, he paid for the expenses of annual masses for the four Grand Masters under which he had served: Cassiere, Verdalle, Garzes, and Wignacourt (who was still alive at the time).<sup>332</sup> More masses were to be celebrated for the soul of every patient of the Hospital who was buried in the cemetery, in such a way that there would be at least one daily mass in the Church of the Pietà. All these masses had to be recorded in writing, each listed with the date, time, and name of the priest who celebrated them, as was common practice. There was little

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<sup>328</sup> N.L.M., MS 142, Vol. IV, 61

<sup>329</sup> Such as the galley squadron for instance.

<sup>330</sup> N.L.M., MS 142, Vol. IV, 64; "...detti Sacerdoti dicano tante messe si per le Bisavi miei, come anche per mio Padre, Madre, Fratelli, Sorelle ed altri Parenti e sucessori di casa Nibbio e questa e la mia intenzione."

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> Giorgio Nibbia joined the Order on the 26 May 1574 according to Dal Pozzo; Dal Pozzo, Bartolomeo, *Ruolo Generale dei Cavalieri Gerosolimitani della Veneranda Lingua d'Italia* (Messina, Vincenzo d'Amico, 1689), 39.



room for spontaneity in the establishment of pious foundations, to the extent that testamentary executors were chosen specifically to govern the financial and legal responsibilities as decreed. Giorgio Nibbia wanted the administration of his Foundation to be entrusted either to one of his descendants who joined the Order, or in the absence of a knight from the house Nibbia, a commission made up of Novarese knights, his compatriots, and members of the *Camerata*.<sup>333</sup> Novara incidentally happens to be in the same region as Arona, Borromeo's birthplace. The Nibbia document, albeit not being a particularly unique source in form or nature, helps us understand the complex framework and the role that individuals and communities played in shaping devotional spaces, and by extension, devotional practices.

A single individual could form part of several communities or groups, each time sharing a different experience with a different group of people, possibly in a different space. With Giorgio Nibbia we see precisely this. Being Novarese, he felt close to other knights from the same city; but he was also affiliated to the langue of Italy, where the members of the community were not necessarily knights but were united by their cultural background. He even appointed two priests from this langue as the first two chaplains in the Church he built. He was also part of another community, the *Camerata*, which was composed of knights from different *langues* under the leadership of spiritual directors who generally were not even members of the Order. The members of the *Camerata* were united not because of rank or nationality but a particular lifestyle. One single individual followed a different set of rules that related to the different communities and spaces he frequented, regulations that conditioned anything from behaviour to clothing. With the *Sacra Infermeria* we can look closer into how space and community affected behaviour since the hospital itself had its own Rule<sup>334</sup> that functioned alongside the general Rule and Statutes of the Order. The Hospital Rule has a chapter entirely dedicated to the spiritual care offered by the chaplains of the Order.

The Prior of the Infirmary and the assistant Vice-Prior were chosen by the Grand Master and approved by the Prior of the Conventual Church, who was the highest ranking of all the conventual chaplains. They were chosen for a period of two years, with the Vice-Prior being

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<sup>333</sup> N.L.M., MS 142, Vol. IV, 66.

<sup>334</sup> N.L.M., MS 377.

preferably Maltese.<sup>335</sup> When a patient was admitted into the hospital, these two chaplains were possibly among the first one would meet, since it was their duty to ascertain that all newly admitted patients confessed and received communion as soon as possible, even if they were not afflicted with anything terminal. The purpose of this was to sanctify the place by purifying the people, both in the spiritual and literal sense.

The duties of the chaplains can, in fact, be divided into three categories: the moral, which consisted of making sure the patients were not presented with opportunities to sin, the sacramental (such as communion, confession and extreme unction), and the administrative, such as the distribution of working hours. One moral duty of the Prior was to make sure that no women of ill repute entered the premises, not even with the pretext of visiting a family member. Sacramental duties were much more exacting, and for this reason, the Prior and the Vice-Prior were assisted by eight more priests. In this case. There were two more foundations, the Fondazione Diotallevi and the Fondazione Guattinara, which paid for the expenses of these eight priests. These other conventual chaplains had to assist the Prior and the Vice-Prior in hearing confessions, and all ten had a roster to make sure that a priest was always on stand-by, day and night, to offer spiritual consolation where needed. One of the priests was chosen specifically for his Catechetical acumen and was specifically tasked with answering any questions relating to the Catholic faith. This shows that the Order was aware that illness and the prospect of death had a deeply moving effect on some patients, even those who were previously less devout. These worries led patients to ask certain questions about God and the afterlife, and so the Order made sure that the priest who answered those questions was learned enough in catechism.

The importance of discipline is often omitted or viewed in a superficial manner in the analysis of devotional practices. Even though such regulations reflect the institutional imprint on the sacred space, we should not mistake this discipline as being an indicator of a top-down devotion, with the institution imposing the rules and the individuals left to follow them. If anything, the setting up of pious foundations is an example of individual initiative. Fra Nibbia

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<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

was so invested in his project that he obtained a special dispensation from the Chapter General, the highest organ of the Order, to be interred inside the church of Pietà.<sup>336</sup>

The initiative could also be taken by a group of individuals within a community, as is highlighted by the setting up of two confraternities. The first was, in fact, the Venerable Confraternity of the Pietà, St John the Baptist and St Gregory, set up in the church of Nibbia in 1685 with the blessing of Prior Viani.<sup>337</sup> The second, similar to the first, was the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity, an initiative by the Vice-Prior Fra Eusebio Sancellotti, along with six other Maltese chaplains in 1704.<sup>338</sup> These two are further examples of 'communities within a community', whereby a select group within a larger whole, in this case, those having the rank of conventual chaplains, felt the need to create yet a more specialised group that catered for more particular spiritual needs. The idea of a confraternity, even one such as the one above that is based in a physical space, the Hospital, is that it is not confined by geographical limitations. Chaplains could remain members even if they were relocated to service abroad or on the galleys. It is, therefore, a spiritual brotherhood that obtains spatial proximity through prayer. Theologically speaking, this proximity is not even limited by life itself, since the very first objective of any confraternity is the suffrage for the departed brothers: living confreres are primarily tasked with obtaining salvation for the souls of their penitent colleagues in purgatory. This also explains why the Rules of such confraternities are almost exclusively dedicated to the manner through which membership fees are collected and how masses should be said, the former being the means through which the latter could be sustained.

Returning to the question of what makes the *Sacra Infermeria* holy, it was in part the institution's efforts to spend money and resources, not only on medical assistance but also to provide a spiritual healing that sanctified the place. Additionally, this section considered how individual initiative was crucial in creating a devotional blueprint that went beyond what the Order of St John was offering as an institution. These individuals, as well as small groups within

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<sup>336</sup> N.L.M., MS 1953, f.202v.

<sup>337</sup> A.O.M. 1939, f.41v; *Regole per la Confraternita' della B.V. della Pietà nel Cimiterio Nibbia*

<sup>338</sup> A.O.M. 1939, f.29-31v; *Statuti della Confraternita' dei Cappellani d'Ubbidenza*

the wider organisation, wanted to leave a spiritual legacy that would not be limited by the confines of their lifespan. Some members of the Order of St John particularised universal Catholic or Hospitaller mechanisms so that they could make a concrete impact in a very specific place of their choosing. We can even look at this last point in the reverse, that the *Sacra Infermeria* provided members of the Order, be it chaplains, knights of the *camerata* or otherwise, with the opportunity to do something in their lifetime that would redeem their souls from purgatory. In other words, what made the *Sacra Infermeria* holy was that it sanctified its members.

### ***Sacred Space as a classroom***

If there is one space that is associated with Hospitaller devotion more than any other, it is the Conventual Church of Valletta. This chapter has attempted so far to show that the concept of sacred space within the Order of St John went so much further than their main church building, however, we would be amiss to leave out St John's church from the analysis. The reason for dedicating a section in this chapter to the conventual church, with particular attention to the Oratory, is not merely for completion's sake, nor for its spectacular artistic quality which surpasses that of any other Hospitaller church, but for its pedagogical value in relation to what this section of the chapter is dealing with, that is, a spectrum of religious expression.

In treatises and descriptions of the Conventual church of the Order such as that by Fra Domenico Manso (1698),<sup>339</sup> to which we have referred above, we often find that the word *chiesa* is used both in the limited sense of the physical place in Valletta, and the wider understanding of ecclesiology that incorporates all the other churches that the Order had. Manso's treatise, for instance, is made up of six chapters, starting with indulgences that the knights had obtained in perpetuity from the times of the Holy Land, Rhodes, and eventually Malta. He then described all the churches that the Order had in Malta; followed by particular

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<sup>339</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235: *Trattato della Maggior Chiesa Conventuale di S. Giovanni, Opera del Comm. Fra Domenico Manso (1698)*.

liturgies that the Order celebrated in St John's; and then a description of all the relics that the knights owned in their various churches, which we shall examine at a later stage. Manso concluded with two reference sections, the first reproducing a number of Papal Bulls that confirm the Order's particular liturgy on certain feast days, and the final chapter detailing the privileges of the role of the Prior of the Conventual Church, which was an important factor that sustained the Order's ecclesiastical autonomy. This is already an indication of how wide-ranging the meaning of '*Maggior Chiesa*' was, not solely limited to one place. Nevertheless, over the span of approximately a hundred years (ca.1580-1680), one place, with its various internal spaces, became the embodiment of all these Hospitaller ecclesiological expressions. This section will indeed argue that what distinguished St John's Church from all other Hospitaller churches was that it expressed the Order's understanding of itself to a point that it had become a classroom for both new and prospective members.

One of the advantages of having a convent island was that bar some exceptions, all the postulant members would need to spend time in residence at the headquarters. The function of certain spaces reflects therefore the need for the institution to transform these young individuals, coming from different backgrounds, into a cohesive unit. This goes well beyond training them to fight together since first and foremost they needed to understand that they were joining a religious institution that was not comparable to any other organ of the Catholic Church. The majority would have already been in contact with the Order in their home countries, and they would normally have been groomed to become knights from a young age.<sup>340</sup> The Order could, as other religious organisations did, offer a more localised novitiate say in the Pories, but the fact that it stressed the importance of bringing all the novices together in one place<sup>341</sup> illustrates that the Order viewed space and proximity (and distance from home) as necessary for a young member's formation. The Roman Curia welcomed the efforts of the institution, as a *Relatione* from the eve of the Chapter General of 1631 specified.

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<sup>340</sup> For instance, in the biography of Fra Agostino Grimaldi e Rosso, it reads that he was admitted into the Order as a child but needed to confirm his vows in Malta when he turned eighteen. Growing up as a prospective, he collected pamphlets that recounted the Order's exploits and in his school essays he often wrote about the Order, pretending to be older and already a full member, writing to his mother from on-board the galleys; Dell'Epifania, Giovanni Paolo, *L'idea del Cavalier Gerosolimitano mostrata nella vita di Fra D. Agostino Grimaldo, e Rosso* (Messina: Giacomo Mattei, 1662), 40.

<sup>341</sup> Dal Pozzo, I, 346; the establishment of a proper novitiate in Malta under the leadership of a Master of Novices; see: Palma, 108; from 1630 onwards, the Order was discussing the option of having novices in a separate structure from the *auberges* and from the professed knights so that they could be mentored and monitored.

Thanks to the mentoring of three Masters, these novices ‘...often frequented the sacraments, did charitable works and twice a week trained with weapons...’<sup>342</sup>

It should be stressed at this point that the line between individual enterprise and the Order’s initiative becomes somewhat blurred. It is clear that there was some consensus within the Order that designated spaces for novices would be beneficial for their formation since the 1631 Chapter General decreed that novices should reside in a suitably built novice house.<sup>343</sup> While some in the Order thought that this was merely the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent on novices, it seems that other high-ranking members saw the opportunity for a deeper spiritual reform that involved the Camerata and the Jesuits. In 1636, a letter from future pope Fabio Chigi, Inquisitor of Malta, to Cardinal Barberini in Rome<sup>344</sup> upon the election of Fra Jean Paul Lascaris to the Magistracy, touched upon these issues. The letter mentions that the new Grand Master intended to build the house for novices that had been decreed five years earlier by the Chapter General, as well as reopen the Camerata, which he himself had frequented in his youth. It is possible that Lascaris, influenced by his Jesuit confessor Fra Giacomo Cassia, wanted to model the Hospitaller novitiate on the Jesuit one. Furthermore, he might have believed that the Camerata would provide a more ascetic alternative to the *auberges* once the novices took their vows.<sup>345</sup> Whilst Dal Pozzo praised the Camerata as a place where ‘[knights] lived in retreat, devoted to matters of the spirit; but not alienated from the other functions necessary to the service of the Religion’<sup>346</sup> other knights must have seen them as ‘subjects for satire at best and an over-scrupulous lot at worst’,<sup>347</sup> thinking that now, with the election of one of them to the magistracy, the brethren needed to develop a strong relationship with the Jesuits to secure internal promotions within the Order of St John.

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<sup>342</sup> B.A.V., Barb. Lat. 5036 f.6v.

<sup>343</sup> Allen, David, ‘Grand Master Lascaris and the Catholic Reformation’, *The Military Orders and the Reformation: Choices, State Building, and the Weight of Tradition*, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 39 (4), 2006, 291.

<sup>344</sup> 27 June 1636, reproduced in Borg, Vincent, *Fabio Chigi Apostolic Delegate in Malta (1634-1639), an edition of his official correspondence* (Citta del Vaticano: B.A.V., 1967), 211-212.

<sup>345</sup> Allen (2006), 291.

<sup>346</sup> Dal Pozzo I, 483-484; ‘*ritiratis alquanti cavalieri infervorati nella divotione, e nell’opere della misericordia con l’assistere specialmente a gl’Infermi, vivean quivi insieme a mensa commune, ritirati, e diditi allo spirito; an non alienati dall’altre funtioni necessarie al servition della Religione*’.

<sup>347</sup> Allen (2006), 291.

Lascarlis was not the only one who believed that periodical withdrawal from the world and a continuous formation were necessary for the vocation of a knight. Fra Charles de Sales, nephew of another Counter-Reformation stalwart St Francis de Sales,<sup>348</sup> was appointed teacher of the novices on board the galleys by Lascarlis; but when he was not at sea, he frequently attended retreats at the Discalced Carmelite convent of Cospicua.<sup>349</sup> Fra Jacques de Cordon d'Evieu was a member of the Camerata with Lascarlis, as well as the commander of Compesières near Geneva during the same period that St Francis de Sales was active in the region. Along with two other future saints, Vincent de Paul and Jeanne de Chantal, Fra Evieu was pivotal in the foundation of a seminary in Annecy.<sup>350</sup> At Troyes, the Hospitaller commander Fra Noël Brûlart de Sillery hosted Vincent de Paul in his establishment of the French Oratory and invited Jeanne de Chantal to settle there too. He also paid for part of the expenses of the canonisation of Francis de Sales,<sup>351</sup> incidentally canonised by Fabio Chigi. These brief examples illustrate how a space like the Camerata, a community within the wider community, had a direct impact on the role that some of these knights had, even beyond the Hospitaller reality. It brought them in direct contact with saints of their own generation.<sup>352</sup>

As was discussed in the context of the *Sacra Infermeria*, dedication, decoration, and materiality in St John's Church were the result of both necessity and patronage. The Order's ancient privilege of being exempt from any other ecclesiastical jurisdiction necessitated having a designated space for liturgical celebrations, investiture ceremonies and burials. Yet along with necessity and patronage, in St John's we see the Order's evolving concept of memory and the growing desire to impart its ethos in a monumental fashion, primarily to its own members. They were so successful in this that it is nowadays hard to imagine how plain St John's was in the late sixteenth to circa mid-seventeenth centuries.<sup>353</sup> Even though the lack of embellishments did not hinder its liturgical purpose as a church, a space like St John's Church functions on several levels. In 1646, when the French diplomat Balthasar de Monconys

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<sup>348</sup> St Francis de Sales was the mentor of Grand Master Lascarlis himself; Allen (2006), 283.

<sup>349</sup> Allen, David, 'Some Carmelite Influences on the Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem during the Counter-Reformation c.1560-c.1690', *Carmelus*, 42 (1995), 273

<sup>350</sup> Allen (2006), 287.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>353</sup> For a study of pre-1660 Conventual Church, see: Freller, Thomas, 'St John's before Preti, the early years of the Conventual Church of the Order of St John in contemporary descriptions', *Treasures of Malta* 67, (Christmas 2016), Fondazzjoni Partimonju Malti, 31-38.

visited Valletta and St John's, he remarked that '*...except a depiction of the Beheading of St John,*<sup>354</sup> *there is nothing special to see in this temple.*'<sup>355</sup> The inference was that the main church of the Order did not reflect the ostentatiousness that the institution showed in other spheres. Another visitor, Johann Michael von Borch, went as far as to say that Grand Master Raphael Cotoner, who was responsible for launching the renovation project, had at one point considered pulling down the entire structure and building a new one.<sup>356</sup> If there ever was a plan to build a new church, it was never followed, however. After Preti's redecoration, the effect was one of shock and awe, as the unassuming façade betrays none of the opulence that awaited the visitor in the interior. As with most other spaces that involve the Order, this was purely a result of circumstance rather than an effect that had been intended since the church's inception.

The lack of intent in regard to creating a cohesive decorative programme before Preti does not mean there was a lack of motivation for the space to serve its function as a sort of oasis for the soul in the fast-paced rhythm of a fortress city that was perpetually at war. The Oratory of the Beheading of St John is proof of this. Built between 1602 and 1608, it was not part of the original design of the Church, but soon enough became a focal point. Dal Pozzo wrote that some pious knights petitioned Grand Master Wignacourt to have a space in which to frequent the sacraments, which would also serve as a hub for charitable activities and to instruct the novices.<sup>357</sup> The charitable aspect was fulfilled through the transfer of the Confraternity of the Rosary and Mercy<sup>358</sup> to the Oratory, which was in large part composed of knights.<sup>359</sup> Documented members of the Camerata who were also members of this confraternity include the rector, Fra Michele Santa Croce, and the Order's Admiral Fra Gerolamo Alliata.<sup>360</sup> Some

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<sup>354</sup> He was referring to the titular painting by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio which was eventually replaced by the marble rendition of the same subject but is still kept in the sacristy of St John's.

<sup>355</sup> Freller (2016), 31.

<sup>356</sup> Freller (2016), 32.

<sup>357</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 482-483.

<sup>358</sup> Sciberras, Keith, 'Caravaggio, the Confraternita della Misericordia and the original context of the Oratory of the Decollato in Valletta', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXLIX (November 2007), 759-766.

<sup>359</sup> Dal Pozzo, 483; Sciberras (2007), 764; The notarial contract of the 29 July 1602 by which the Confraternity accepted to pay for expenses of the Oratory identifies a total of eighteen knights who were members of the *Rosarianti*.

<sup>360</sup> Fra Gerolamo Alliata (Agliata) was eventually made Rector of the confraternity and could not pass on the opportunity of having the Pilier of the Langue of Italy as its leader. He was in-charge of the Confraternity when the move to St John's was made.



other knights in this confraternity are also known to have been members of the Camerata,<sup>361</sup> such as Fra Bernardo d'Espeleta Xavier,<sup>362</sup> Fra Cateliano Casati, and Fra Ferrante Maggiolini.<sup>363</sup> Fra Pietro Gaeta was tasked with overseeing the project along with Fra Giorgio Nibbia, whose zeal in providing a good Christian burial we have discussed in relation to the *Sacra Infermeria*.<sup>364</sup> This Confraternity was tasked with the spiritual accompaniment of those condemned to the gallows, to help them 'die well'.<sup>365</sup> The Confraternity of the Rosary in Malta was following in the footsteps of other Confraternities of the Rosary in Italy who likewise offered assistance to the condemned.<sup>366</sup> In 1578, the Order's agent Giacomo Bosio was elected as the Confraternity's procurator in Rome, and since then the Maltese 'Rosarianti' became affiliated with the Roman counterpart, which was incidentally also known as *Confraternita di S. Giovanni Decollato*.<sup>367</sup>

Apart from inspiration of their Roman counterpart,<sup>368</sup> the focus on the episode of the condemnation of their patron saint to death was certainly a spiritual anchor-point for these knights who were encouraged to see in the convicts the face of St John himself. Furthermore, in the martyrdom of St John, they were expected to see themselves and learn about the true meaning of self-sacrifice. With the arrival of Caravaggio on the island in the early seventeenth century, the opportunity presented itself to commission a work of art that would encapsulate the pathos of that moment when the head of the saint was about to be placed on a silver

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<sup>361</sup> Dal Pozzo, 483; Sciberras (2007), 764.

<sup>362</sup> Fra Bernardo de Espelta was the Prior of Navarre and a close friend of Grand Master Wignacourt.

<sup>363</sup> Archive of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Rosary and Mercy, Section A, MS 20, f.1.

<sup>364</sup> By 1599, the Confraternity had grown to a point that the first oratory was closed and a new one built next to it. The original structure was sold to Fra Giorgio Nibbia, who was also a member of the Confraternity and played a role in its later transfer to St John's.

<sup>365</sup> A.O.M. 437, *Liber Bullarum 1577-78*, f.274, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1578; "*La Venerabile Confraternita prima eretta in questa nostra Citta Valletta sotto titolo del Santissimo Rosario mossa a pieta et zello della salute dell'anime de Christiani condannati a morte dalla giustitia, dal principio della fondatione sua gia sonno circa tre anni introdusse et se diede a far questa opera di misericordia in aguitar tali delinquent a ben morire. Nel quale santo exercitio ritrovandosi co'essi la note avanti et il giorno processionalmente accompagnando sin'al ultimo supplico et spirare dell'anima...*"; op.cit. Sciberras (2007), 437.

<sup>366</sup> See: Black, Christopher, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1989), 217-223.

<sup>367</sup> Sciberras (2007), 762; Keith Sciberras suggested that the Order lacked the necessary funds to complete the oratory, which explains why the Confraternity of Mercy was offered the space in exchange for their financial contribution. He said, however, that the Confraternity itself was seeking a new place, and the new space attached to St John's was much more prestigious than their humble oratory in Porto Salvo.

<sup>368</sup> The Oratory of the Compagnia della Misericordia in Rome was also dedicated to the episode of the Beheading of St John; Sciberras (2007), 764.

plate, a morbid showpiece at King Herod's feast.<sup>369</sup> Alongside Bartolomeo Garagona's lunette showing the martyrs of St Elmo, it had to provoke in those novices a much-needed sense of reality, to counteract any romanticised notions they might have had in regard to their membership in the Order.

A violent death was not a remote possibility, as was evidenced by the fact that the Oratory was partially built above the burial area of some knights who were recovered from the rubble after the siege of 1565. The lesson that the space was imparting was much more pragmatic than what first meets the eye, but which is spelt out in a sixteenth-century '*Discorso Morale sull'Assedio di Malta*'.<sup>370</sup> The anonymous author of this moralistic essay wrote that some of



Figure 9: The Oratory of St John, engraving by Wolfgang Kilian, Osterhausen, *Eigentlicher und gründlicher* (1650)

<sup>369</sup> For a thorough study on how the space was physically altered, see: Stone, David M., 'The Context of Caravaggio's 'Beheading of St John' in Malta' *Burlington Magazine* (March, 1997), 161-170; Sciberras doubts that the Confraternity or the Order had sufficient money to pay for this work, seeing how the Dominicans delayed the payment for their old oratory and the Order had passed the responsibility for paying the new oratory to the Misericordia. He suggests it could either have been an individual patron who paid, but more probably served as Caravaggio's own *passagium*, his contribution to join the Order; Sciberras (2007), 766.

<sup>370</sup> Da Palma (2015), 78.

those knights who fought in the siege would not have saved their souls had it not been for the fact that they died a martyr's death and in so doing, won heaven. As for those who were injured, the author expressed hope that their mutilations would contribute to their conversion and that they would focus on a spiritual healing.<sup>371</sup> In other words, in the oratory one might find himself surrounded by saints, but the message was intended to target the more obdurate towards piety. It was therefore befitting that, since at least 1608, the space was used for investiture ceremonies as well as for the ritual of *privatio habitus*, the process of disrobing a knight before he was imprisoned, as is shown in the Osterhausen image.<sup>372</sup> (Fig. 9) Caravaggio's own trial – in absentia - took place in the Oratory.<sup>373</sup>

It seems that the Order gradually took complete control of the oratory, which was facilitated, it seems because the Confraternity never had plenipotent ownership of it. The overlap in usage of the Oratory, shared it seems between the needs of the Confraternity of Mercy and that of the Order was partly the result of knights occupying central roles in both. For instance, Fra Bernardo d'Espelta, camerata and confraternity member, also occupied the role of Commissioner for novices till 1607,<sup>374</sup> effecting its gradual transformation into a classroom for Hospitaller aspirants. Rooms next to the Oratory were assigned to Masters of Novices, such as Fra Antonio Pena de Lanna, who was Professor of Theology from 1611.<sup>375</sup> Another room above the Oratory was used as a library where all books gathered from the *spogli* could be made accessible to the novices.<sup>376</sup> The crypt beneath the Oratory, named after the Bolognese theologian and Master of novices Fra Giovanni Bertolotti, was used as a new communal burial place for knights.<sup>377</sup> At one point, Wignacourt himself planned to be buried in the Oratory and specifically commissioned Fra Francesco Buonarroti to submit a project to this effect.<sup>378</sup> Sciberras claims that 'Ironically, the oratory's physical proximity to the church

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<sup>371</sup> Da Palma (2015), 78.

<sup>372</sup> Osterhausen, Christian von, *Eigentlicher und gründlicher...* (Augsburg, 1650).

<sup>373</sup> Sciberras (2007), 766; Stone (1997), 161.

<sup>374</sup> A.O.M. 6430, Sciberras (2007), 766.

<sup>375</sup> A.O.M. 103, *Liber Conciliorum* 1608-10, f.6v; Sciberras (2007), 766.

<sup>376</sup> Sciberras (2007), 766.

<sup>377</sup> Stone (1997), 168; Built in 1603, it was first used as a replacement for the cemetery area that the Oratory had occupied. The first to be interred within it were martyrs of the siege of 1565 who had been exhumed for the foundations of the Oratory to be placed.

<sup>378</sup> It was Francesco's dream to become the Order's commissioner of works, and Wignacourt's commission would have certainly led to that. The Grand Master wanted a design for the tombs of himself and his brother, who had died in Malta, as well as a possible upgrade of the decoration of the Oratory. Francesco submitted two

of St John – which had attracted the Confraternity in the first place – was the reason that the Knights of St John used their enormous power to oust the Confraternity from its seat.<sup>379</sup> It would, nevertheless, be more nuanced to say that these ‘independent’ initiatives such as the Confraternity of Mercy or the Camerata were catering for a need to refine the novitiate before the Order’s Chapter General addressed the issue. In the case of the Oratory, the merging of space resulted in a merging of ideals, thanks also to the overlap of members in both communities. Although the Confraternity of Mercy continued to exist autonomously, by occupying the Oratory mostly through ritual, the Order of St John was also absorbing those initiatives and practices that it felt could be beneficial for Hospitallers. Meanwhile, the number of knights residing in the Camerata gradually dwindled, possibly owing to an increased number of knights residing in the auberges and private houses in Valletta. On the other hand, the commitment towards reform by those knights who had at one point passed from the Camerata does not seem to wane. Testament to this is the vigorous spiritual programme promoted by the Camerata’s highest-ranking member upon his election to the Magistracy, Fra Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar.<sup>380</sup> Lascaris, described by the then Inquisitor Fabio Chigi as a ‘*uomo di santa vita*’, vowed to re-establish the Camerata, open a house for conventual chaplains to live together and reform the novitiate.<sup>381</sup> It is not clear to what degree the Camerata reopened under Lascaris’ magistracy. In 1636, Inquisitor Fabio Chigi informed Cardinal Barberini that ‘the Camerata has already been set up, and the canonical house and novitiate will follow in less than a year.’<sup>382</sup> In 1639, when Lascaris attempted to revive the English Langue, the administrator of the Camerata Fra Maximilan d’Ampont offered it as a residence for Fra Nicholas Fortescue and other eventual knights from England.<sup>383</sup> On the other hand, the growing anti-Jesuit sentiments that resulted in the Carnival Riot that same

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designs, one of which still survives (Uffizi, GDSU5374A, published for the first time by Sebegondi Fiorentini). The Buonarroti plan is uncannily like the Osterhausen rendition, particularly the two doors on either side of the altar beneath the framed titular painting; Buonarroti Arch. 105, f.194, f.195v; This hurt Buonarroti deeply as expressed in Buonarroti Arch. 106, f.233; See: Sebegondi Fiorentini, Ludovica, ‘Francesco Buonarroti, cavaliere gerosolimitano e architetto dilettante’, *Rivista d’Arte* (1986), 74-77.

<sup>379</sup> Sciberras (2007), 766.

<sup>380</sup> Borg, Vincent, *Fabio Chigi*, 214.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 235; ‘*Gia la Camerata è in piedi, et la canonical et il novitiate in un anno vi potranno essere.*’

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 96; Fra Nicholas Fortescue died during the English Civil War, which also interrupted plans for the revival of the English Langue.

year<sup>384</sup> might have hindered Lascaris' long-term plans for the retreat house that had increasingly become associated with an Ignatian rather than a Borromeian spirituality.

The link between space and behaviour exemplified by the relationship between the two heterotopias that this section discussed – the Camerata and the Oratory – is confirmed with the election of Grand Master Carafa in 1680. On 19 May 1680, Inquisitor Cantelmo wrote to Cardinal Petrucchino, asking him to intervene on the Order's behalf with the Jesuit General to send priests from his order to preach to the knights:

*'...a trait of this Grand Master [Gregorio Carafa] is the piety and zeal to see reinvigorated religious discipline in the Order, one of the many means through which he plans to reach this aim...wants to establish in the Church of St John an Oratory in which every Sunday and principal feast the knights could congregate together to listen to the Divine Gospel and participate in many acts of devotion...'*<sup>385</sup>

Two years later, Carafa built a retreat house attached to the Discalced Carmelite convent in Cospicua.<sup>386</sup> Soon after, Carafa's Secretary for France, Fra Jean-Baptiste le Marinier de Cany, along with seven other knights and a chaplain, was responsible for the reopening of the Camerata.<sup>387</sup> One could say that when the Order wanted to reinforce the concept of Valletta

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<sup>384</sup> See: Buttigieg, Emanuel, 'Knights, Jesuits, Carnival and the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Malta', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 2012), 571-596.

<sup>385</sup> AAV, S.S. Malta, Vol. 31, f.73.

<sup>386</sup> AAV, S.S. Malta, Vol 33, f.7: 17 January 1682, Inquisitor Cantelmo to Cardinal Cybo – "Procurando il S. G.Mro di promuovere l'avanzamento d'una religiosa pieta nei cavalieri del suo Ordine, ha intrapreso la fabrica d'un ritiro per gli esercizi spirituali dentro il convento de Pri Carmelitani Scalzi quali, accio possino, con applicatione distina attendere a questa santa opera sono stati richiesti di collocare a tal fine qui due soggetti, l'uno di Nazione Francese e l'altro Italiana; mi ha percio comandato di supplicare in suo nome V.E. che si degni ordinare al Pre Generale, d'inviare due Padri periti nella pratica di detti esercizi, e insieme impetrare dalla somma bonta di Nro Sre il Tesoro dell'Indulgenza plenario, in specie per i cavalieri, che dentro lo spatio di dieci, otto, o cinque giorni, secondo lo spirito di ciascheduno, si tratteranno in si divoto ritiro quale, per il gran profitto prodotto in alcuno che l'hanno ultimamente praticato, promette un bene spirituale non ordinario, che merita d'essere accreditato dalle benedittione di sua Santita..."; *Ibid.*, f.42: 28 April 1682 "Con sentimenti di molta veneratione ha ricevuto questo Sig. GM il Breve dell'Indulgenze concesse dalla Sta di Nro Sig in occasione della Fabrica che si va facendo nel convento di questi Pri Carmelitani Scalzi, per il ritiro spirituale de' cavalieri...". The retreat house remained without a rector for some time, as until August there was no news from the Carmelite General to this effect. Carafa had requested they send the Neapolitan Don Gio Batta della Concettione: *Ibid.*, f.92, f.178.

<sup>387</sup> The Camerata was reopened in 1685; Da Palma, Luigi Michele, 'Jean-Baptiste Le Marinier de Cany un maestro della spiritualità giovanita' in Benedetti et al. (eds.), "Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum", *Studi in onore di Fra Giovanni Scarabelli per I cinquant'anni di sacerdozio* (Viareggio: Ed. La Villa, 2019), 98.

as a 'New Jerusalem', the renovation of the Oratory and the Camerata were their points of departure. One of the knights who frequented the Jesuit and Carmelite-led retreat houses in the 1680s, Fra Gabriel du Bois de la Ferté, wrote home saying that '*Malta has changed altogether, and it has come back from all manner of debauchery; we now have here some very virtuous knights who live like angels.*'<sup>388</sup>

Mattia Preti's renovation of the Oratory in 1680<sup>389</sup> is nothing more than the same expression of *metanoia* in colour. (Fig.10) Although Preti took inspiration from the already existing features, the only constant in the oratory since it was first commissioned remained the titular painting by Caravaggio; the rest is mostly Preti. It was the first opportunity the Order had since the construction of the Conventual Church to present a consistent decorative language, all by the same hand, since Preti could carry on the themes from the main church to the Oratory to make it, as he had done in the main vault, a truly Hospitaller sacred space. He replaced the Garagona lunette of the siege of 1565 with a relief of Our Lady of Sorrows and had the ceiling encased in wood with paintings showing scenes from the Passion of Christ in the intervals. He also added a new marble altar and added windows to one side. Old paintings of the saints of the Order that hung on both sidewalls of the space,<sup>390</sup> were replaced with another set that was similar in iconography to the originals but stylistically more baroque. Preti carried forward the theme of Hospitaller saints on the sides of the Caravaggio painting with two new works, one showing St John the Baptist pointing to the Lamb of God with the kneeling founders of the Order, and the other showing the Virgin Mary admitting St Flora and Doña Sancha in the Order. Conspicuous is the absence of Blessed Garcia Martinez and Pietro

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<sup>388</sup> Allen (1995), 275.

<sup>389</sup> The renovation took a full fifteen years; Stone (1997), 161.

<sup>390</sup> Commissioned by Grand Master Wignacourt, now at the Wignacourt Museum in Rabat.

da Imola, while St Nicasius' portrait departs completely from the known iconography, placing him kneeling at the altar with a battle scene in the background. Preti possibly painted the death of Fra Abel Bridiers (Gardampé), one of the martyrs of St Elmo, and not St Nicasius, thus making a passing reference to the old Garagona theme. This is how Bosio described it:

*'...the death of Fra Abel, known as Gardampé, from Auvergne, who was hit by a musket shot in the chest... and whilst others wanted to carry him away to safety, he told them virtuously to remain at their posts and continue fighting for the Holy Faith. He stood up and walked to the Chapel of St Elmo and when he reached the altar, he recommended his soul to God and died. His death left in the hearts of all a deep sense of faith and a firm belief that he was amongst the saints in heaven.'*<sup>391</sup>



Figure 10:  
Oratory of St John following Preti's renovations,  
Phillip Von Brockdorff, Nineteenth c.  
watercolour,  
Courtesy: National Library of Malta

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<sup>391</sup> Bosio III, 541.



Keith Sciberras pointed out how Preti used muted colours and the same scheme that Caravaggio used, 'allowing the Beheading to take full control of the oratory space'.<sup>392</sup> This is particularly evident when one considers the cycle of saints in the Oratory in comparison with the ones Preti had executed in the vault a few years earlier. Yet the new paintings still conditioned the use of the space, since for the sake of their preservation, the Holy Week Sepulchre, an apparatus that consisted of scores of candles, was moved out of the Oratory so that the artwork would not be damaged by the soot.<sup>393</sup> The relic of the right hand of St John and the statuary group of the crucifixion were placed on the main altar, occupying the most central point of view in the Oratory that could also be seen from the outside, and obstructed the view of Caravaggio's painting.<sup>394</sup> The modern viewer could easily get distracted by all these features, but in truth, they were all oriented towards the same aim: provoking a sincere conversion of the heart. The prison scene in Caravaggio's masterpiece, the saints' portraits that mimic windows into these individuals' lives through Preti's use of perspective, and the classroom that was equally a burial ground, all contribute to a space that was malleable to the necessities of those who made use of it.

### ***Fuori Convento***

Mapping what was taking place in the Order's commanderies during the same time period is not easy, since it is not always documented with the same rigour and necessitates looking at a huge geographical spread. Nevertheless, in this chapter, we shall consider one case-study from the Order's overseas territories to highlight how the Order was not just Malta, and therefore any discussion on Hospitaller sacred space should strive to change perspectives, if possible, from universal to particular. At least three of the 1588 *Statuta* plates show scenes from the commanderies. The Order's *extra-convento* spaces could be considered peripheries of Malta and therefore particulars that take aspects of both their geographical location and their relationship from the distant island-order state. We will consider the Ligurian

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<sup>392</sup> Sciberras (2020), 201.

<sup>393</sup> Sciberras (2020), 198-201; By order of the Council in 1687.

<sup>394</sup> These will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



commandery of San Giovanni in Pré as a case study.<sup>395</sup> This Genoese example is especially compelling because it involves actors that this chapter has emphasised, such as Grand Master Wignacourt and Cardinal Borromeo. It will also serve as a connecting line with the sections that will deal with sacred materiality. It is through such documents that the interdependence of space and objects is rendered clear.

The *visita* that we shall look at took place in 1582, whilst the Order was still recovering from the coup against Grand Master La Cassiere. It was led by Mons. Francesco Bossio and the intent was to assess whether the Order's territories in Liguria were in line with the spirit of the Council of Trent.<sup>396</sup> His visit and the report Bossio drew up are relatively similar to the one Mons. Pietro Dusina prepared for Malta in 1575. The visitation programme was indeed a coordinated effort, at least for Italy (of which Malta was always considered a geographical extension), and at its helm was none other than Carlo Borromeo. Francesco Bossio was also Milanese, but he had met Borromeo in Rome where he had served as his vicar in Santa Maria Maggiore. Later, the same Borromeo would call on him for help in the visitation programme, seeing also to his appointment as Bishop of Novara. The Genoese visitations of 1582 were part of a sequence of visits that included some Tuscan cities in 1576 (Siena, Massa Grosseto, Pienza, Montalcino), another in 1580 in Borgo San Donnino (Parma) and after Genoa the visitation of Lodi in 1583, all requested by Carlo Borromeo.<sup>397</sup>

The church of San Giovanni in Pré was one of the most historically and spiritually significant Hospitaller churches in Italy, not only for being one of the oldest but also because it conserved the body of St Ugo Canefri, who had served in that same commandery. The study of the Order's commandery churches after Trent cannot be reduced to simply the assessment of the Italian ones, much less project the state of a few examples over the rest; but a lot can be taken from even one apostolic visitation to such an important commandery by a bishop who was in tune with the reforms that Borromeo wanted to implement. If anything, it proves the

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<sup>395</sup> Much of the documents on the religious state of this commandery after the Council of Trent, come from apostolic visitations that were first published by Lorenzo Tacchella in 1977; Tacchella, Lorenzo, *I Cavalieri di Malta in Liguria* (Genova: Tilgher, 1977).

<sup>396</sup> Tacchella, 121.

<sup>397</sup> Prosperi, Adriano, 'Bossi Francesco, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. XIII (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971), 303-305.

gradualness of the process that does not take place automatically or even simultaneously in all Hospitaller churches but was dependent on individual initiative and geographical placement. Moreover, the entire process was subject to canon law and the privileges enjoyed by Order, which at times resulted in heated debates over the very right of visitation. In this case, San Giovanni in Pré was along Borromeo's Rome-Milan axis and thus ideally placed for Borromeo to exercise his early influence.

Francesco Bossio's recommendations were very much focused on having adequate space and enough liturgical materiality for the sacraments to be celebrated as deemed fit by the *Instructiones*. He found, for instance, that the chapel of St Anne in the '*chiesa inferiore*' was excessively humid, and therefore banned its use. He also ordered the provision of two confessionals within the month, as well as the purchase of three chalices with their patenas, twenty-nine purificators and five receptacles for the patenas.<sup>398</sup> These are very specific numbers that prove that Bossio opened every sacristy drawer and checked the quantity and state of each liturgical item, taking note of what was missing or needed to be replaced. Furthermore, he also considered the adjoining spaces to the church, such as a cellar that he decreed was to be used for some pious enterprise as the commander saw fit. He exhorted the commander, Fra Miniali, to work towards a greater devotion, while at the same time found that the priest Antonio Porta was not adept at hearing confessions and so prohibited him from doing so.<sup>399</sup>

Archbishop Francesco Bossio's visitation document, which represents the initial phase of the implementation of the Council's decrees, can be juxtaposed with another visitation document from 1710 that represents what this study is considering a full cycle, or rather the confrontation of the interpretative phase of the Council that featured Borromeo and his adjutants, with the epitome or the consolidation of Tridentinism, more than a century later.<sup>400</sup> In May 1710, the visit was carried out by Fra Carlo Simeone<sup>401</sup> in adherence to the old

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<sup>398</sup> Tacchella, 121.

<sup>399</sup> Tacchella, 122.

<sup>400</sup> The same timeframe was considered in Perellos' documentation of the cult of St Paul with the 1710 *Cabreo*

<sup>401</sup> A[rchivio di] S[tato] T[orino], *Ordine di Malta*, Mazzo 271 (B.7) f.57. "Visita Priorale del 2o Quinquennio del Sig. Gran Priore della Lombardia Fra Marcello Sacchetti...delle Comende infrascritte e loro membri fatta dal Comendatore Simeoni"

Statutory decrees that imposed a Prioral visit to all the commanderies in that priory every five years. At face value, the two reports seem stylistically similar. But while the Bossio visit was principally meant to make sure that San Giovanni in Pré was conformant with Tridentine practices, the Simeone visit was more intended as a documentary exercise, which explains the inventory-like description of the places and objects.

The visitation document reads like a virtual tour of the places mentioned. Following the arrival and reception ceremonies of the visitor, which also included a moment of prayer in front of the Holy Eucharist, the description starts with the outer structure of the Church, the doors, outer stairs, corridors, the coat of arms, and the inscriptions on the walls. One can take the description in hand and systematically follow an inventory of movable and immovable objects that adorn the different internal spaces. Starting from the main nave and the main altar, the visit mentions the tabernacle first, which the rector of the church opened for the delegation so that they could count how many pyxes were inside. The amount of detail given for each of the items allows one to almost visualise the space. They heard the organ play which is how they could write that it needed no repairs, they copied a 1627 inscription in wood at the base of a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary, since it contained the name of its patron, they took note of all the other paintings and statues, describing the colours and materials of each, as well as whether they were in a glass case or niche. Two confessionals, possibly the same two ordered by Bossio almost a hundred and thirty years earlier, are listed along with a movable pulpit. When they got to the sacristy, they described in detail the collection of relics, starting from the most important, the body of St Ugo.<sup>402</sup>

The visit concluded with an attestation by the rector who explained his duties. This part details the liturgical functions in an early eighteenth-century commandery, which include the exposition of the Holy Eucharist twice annually for the *quarantore* and the solemn sung mass on the feast of St John the Baptist. On the other hand, the chaplain was neglecting to celebrate mass on the octave of the *septuagesima*<sup>403</sup> for the souls of departed knights, nor was he observing the masses on the feasts on the Immaculate Conception and the plague

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<sup>402</sup> Tacchella, 125

<sup>403</sup> The Septuagesima is the seventy-day count from Easter, so the first octave would be the eight day of those seventy.

patrons Sts Roche, Rosalia, and Sebastian. The reference to these feasts provides a link with Malta as they highlight particular Hospitaller devotions in Genoa. The celebration of the Solemnity of Feasts of the Immaculate Conception and plague patrons in all Hospitaller churches was decreed by the Magistracy following a vow made with the saints to intercede and end the 1676 epidemic in Malta.<sup>404</sup>

A greater problem had been identified by Francesco Bossio in 1582 in the nearby Hospitaller church of S. Fede, also filial of S. Giovanni in Pré, located only a few minutes by foot from the main commandery church. Not only was the church found to be missing some essential spaces such as a sacristy, but it seemed the rector was completely unaware of the privileges and duties annexed to this church's altars. He was invited to focus less on the administration of the nearby hospital of S. Antonio and to dedicate more time to the care of the souls placed in his trust.<sup>405</sup> Fast forward to the Simeoni visit in 1710 and a somewhat different picture emerges, at least in terms of the spiritual duties to be followed for the care of souls in that church. The liturgical practices had been entrusted to the Minor Clerics Regular commonly known as Caracciolini, by Grand Master Wignacourt in 1614. In exchange for this benefice, they were to celebrate a daily mass in San Giovanni in Pré and give the commander a blessed palm every Palm Sunday and a blessed candle on the feast of the Purification of the Virgin. They had to celebrate an annual suffrage mass for Fra Annibale Miniali, who was the commander who made the endowment possible.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Dal Pozzo, Vol. II (1715), 446.

<sup>405</sup> Tacchella, 137.

<sup>406</sup> Tacchella, 137.





Figure 11: View of Genoa (1766) showing the locations of [left to right] San Giovanni in Pre, San Fedele and Our Lady of Victories



The overlapping of particular and universal devotions is perhaps best witnessed in yet another dependence of the commandery of San Giovanni in Pré, the church of St John the Baptist and Our Lady of Victory (*Fig. 11*). Genova and the Order share a common devotion, that of St John the Baptist, whose ashes were donated to the Cathedral of St Lawrence in 1118. The confraternity of St John the Baptist built a sumptuous chapel for these relics in 1450, and this did not go unnoticed by the Order, in particular the Cardinal Grand Master Pierre d'Aubusson (r.1467-1503), who wanted to purchase some houses adjacent to the Cathedral, as close to the St John chapel as possible, with a college of twelve chaplains of the Order tasked with the promulgation of devotion towards St John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, to whom d'Aubusson attributed the victory of the Siege of Rhodes of 1480.<sup>407</sup> When Simeone visited, he was greeted by only four chaplains.<sup>408</sup> Above the doorway was a relief of the baptism of Christ, surmounted by the arms of d'Aubusson, and painted on the wall on either side were the coat of arms of the Order and that of Grand Master Wignacourt. Genoese and Hospitaller devotions were also intertwined in the titular painting that showed the Blessed Virgin, with St John the Baptist and St Pantaleon,<sup>409</sup> on whose feast day the victory *Te Deum* was sung in 1480.<sup>410</sup> A small window on the side gave the faithful a peek into the adjacent chapel of St John in the cathedral of St Lawrence where the saint's ashes were kept, with the window serving as a direct channel of that saint's graces into the Order's sacred space. In sum, universal devotions such as those of St John the Baptist and the Virgin were given a double significance; the commemoration of a historically meaningful event for the Order coupled with a special regional devotion towards St John built around a twelfth-century relic.

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<sup>407</sup> This coincides with other churches and oratories that d'Aubusson founded in Rhodes in the aftermath of the 1480 siege; Bosio II, 413.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>410</sup> N.L.M., MS 235, f.4



*Figure 12: Church of St John and Our Lady of Victory adjacent St Lawrence Cathedral, Genoa. The Coat of Arms of D'Aubusson can still be seen above the doorway, as is that of the Order frescoed on the left. The arms of Wignacourt have since disappeared.*

## *The Floating Parish*

The influence of the Borromean-Jesuit crossover in Hospitaller spirituality is best observed in the context of the Order's attempt to present the galley, their primary war machine, as a sacred space. As has already been mentioned, the allegory of a floating vessel, navigating the tribulations of life, was certainly not exclusive to the Order or new for the early modern period.<sup>411</sup> To begin with, the sea is frequently present in the Gospels. Christ calmed storms, walked on water, and multiplied fish in the sea of Galilee. The allegory of the ship is also present in Marian cults. By way of its nomadic properties, the cult of Loreto became 'the first among all Marian images'. Loreto's capabilities of movement were likened by Gumpfenberg to a ship, whose mast is the Cross of Christ and whose sail is the cloak of Mary: '...this Holy House could never be located far from the sea, because it is a ship'.<sup>412</sup> The Orders vessels could scarcely equate themselves to either Peter or Mary's boat; they were cramped, smelly places where Christians and non-Christians were confined to spending endless scorching days and freezing nights together.<sup>413</sup> Swearing and blasphemy were rampant even among the higher-ranking mariners, as was gambling and fighting. It was in this context that often a lone conventual chaplain was called to form a flock that better mirrored the allegory of a parish at sea, a microcosm of the universal Church. In 1588, Grand Master Verdalle requested some concessions for his sailors and chaplains serving on the galleys. In response, Pope Sixtus V issued a set of privileges that only covered the Order's navy: those sailors who happened to be at sea on fasting days could invert the fasting by eating during the day and fasting at night; chaplains could celebrate mass two hours before daybreak; and they could hear confessions at sea and absolve sins as often as necessary except those sins that only the Pope could forgive (*Bulla Coena Domini*). Moreover, every chaplain was allowed to carry a portable altar to say mass on the galleys, as long as an adequate space on deck was provided.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce* (Roma: Alfonso Ciacone, 1610), 303-304.

<sup>412</sup> Dekoninck, Ralph, 'Propagatio Imaginum: The Translated Images of Our Lady of Foy', *The Nomadic Object, The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, Göttinger, Mochizuki (eds.) (Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2018), 245.

<sup>413</sup> Buttigieg, Emmanuel, 'Corpi e anime in schiavitù: schiavi musulmani nella Malta dei Cavalieri di San Giovanni (1530-1798)', *Schiavitù del Corpo e Schiavitù dell'Anima, Chiesa potere politico e schiavitù tra Atlantico e Mediterraneo (sec.XVI-XVIII)* (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2018), 287-310.

<sup>414</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235, f.16.



Despite these concessions, there were still difficulties that the space itself presented. The most challenging ones related to the sacramental rituals, particularly confession. The *Roman Catechism* (1566) sought to promote the sacrament of confession as an instrument of social cohesion,<sup>415</sup> therefore if used diligently, it could become a formidable tool in the chaplain's arsenal, especially in a place like the galley where accord was paramount. Despite there being little guidance for the naval chaplain in any of Borromeo's confessors' manuals, as De Boer pointed out, 'those who cultivated Borromeo's published works made them serviceable to new circumstances and contexts.'<sup>416</sup> An undated and unsigned manual, specifically designed for chaplains of the Order 'especially those serving at sea', is one such case of contextualising existing knowledge.<sup>417</sup> It was almost certainly produced by the conventual chaplain Fra Fabrizio Cagliola (d.1665), a jurist who had experience at sea, as is clear also from his semi-fictional *Le Disavventure Marinaresche di Gabriello*.<sup>418</sup> Someone with a legal background like Cagliola was ideally placed to write about the sacrament of confession that, in Borromeo's ideal, was as much a judicial instrument of discipline as any.<sup>419</sup> Moreover, the galley had the potential to be an environment where sin tended to thrive, so the instructions were not merely intended to regulate the individual, but the space itself lest it presented occasions of sin.<sup>420</sup>

The author mentioned that he drew up the manual upon the request of Fra Antonio Berzetti, who lamented that those tasked with the spiritual care of the mariners were often faced with circumstances that were not covered by the Order's *Statutes*. Berzetti hailed from Vercelli in modern-day Piedmont, close to Borromeo's Arona and Nibbia's Novara. He served as an Ambassador to the Holy See (1622), Admiral of the Order (1634), and Prior of Messina

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<sup>415</sup> De Boer, Wietse, 'At Heresy's Door: Borromeo, Penance and Confessional Boundaries in Early Modern Europe' in *A New History of Penance*, Abigail Firey (ed.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 347.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>417</sup> A[rchive of the] I[nquisition of] M[alta], Misc. 56, *Istruzioni dei Cappellani specialmente delle Galere*.

<sup>418</sup> Fra Cagliola died soon after being ransomed from a three-year enslavement in Tunisia. He had been captured at sea. Dal Pozzo (1715), 332; Palma, *Il Frate Cavaliere*, 177.; Cagliola, Fabrizio, *Disavventure marinaresche, o sia Gabriello disavventurato*, a cura di G. Curmi (Valletta: Malta Litteraria 1929); Aresti, Alessandro, 'Letteratura maltese in lingua italiana. Le disavventure marinaresche di Fabrizio Cagliola', in *Quaderni della Facoltà di Lingue e letterature straniere dell'Università di Cagliari* 13, (Roma: Aracne) 7-21.

<sup>419</sup> De Boer, *At Heresy's Door*, 352.

<sup>420</sup> A term with a long moral-theological tradition; *Ibid.*

(1635).<sup>421</sup> There is not sufficient evidence to indicate that Berzetti was a member of the Camerata, but he likely was at least in close contact with other knights who were, including the future Grand Master Lascaris.

In his study on early modern Spain, Patrick O'Banion noted two points that would help us understand why a galley captain would be willing to ask a canon lawyer for a context-specific instruction book, a practice that had become increasingly popular in the seventeenth century.<sup>422</sup> Firstly, these manuals could help untangle the complicated relationship between the priests and the penitents, particularly in a potentially tense environment such as a war galley. This could be achieved by fostering a relationship of mutual respect rather than one of clerical supremacy.<sup>423</sup> Cagliola called this 'the virtue of Prudence' and described a manner that is sweet and docile and gentle, adept for a chaplain's status, without any indecency. The confessor must console his penitent to persuade him by making use of reason, converse with him and patiently lead him to see his errors and to feel sad and disappointed about what he has done. As an example of this manner, he recounted an anecdote involving St Francis Xavier and a soldier who had not confessed for eighteen years.<sup>424</sup>

Secondly, these manuals could easily apply to the young knight as an instruction on how to adequately prepare for confession. The second part of the volume details fifteen points that make a good confession.<sup>425</sup> They can be subdivided into thoughts and actions, with some points overlapping for the sake of numerical evenness. *Humilis, Pura, Fidelis, Nuda, Libens*, and *Veneranda* refer to the mental disposition before and during the sacrament, namely that the penitent approaches with a sense of humbleness (*humilis*), with pure intentions (*pura*), prepared to say the complete truth (*fidelis*), to realise that one is standing as a sinner before God (*nuda*), free from fear or threats after a proper examination of the conscience (*libens*), and with an honest sense of remorse for the sins committed (*veneranda*). As for actions, Cagliola suggested that one should confess frequently (*frequens*), speak plainly, leaving out

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<sup>421</sup> Tibaldeschi, Giorgio, 'Un cavaliere di Malta vercellese: fra Giovanni Antonio Berzetti di Buronzo (1570-1645)', *Bollettino Storico Vercellese*, n.29/1 (2000), 85-135.

<sup>422</sup> O'Banion, Patrick, "'A Priest who appears Good': Manuals of confession and the construction of clerical identity in early modern Spain', *Dutch Review of Church History*, January 2005 (Leiden: Brill), 334-348.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>424</sup> AIM, Misc. 55, f.3v.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, f.150v-152.

superfluous detail (*simplex*), choose wisely a prudent spiritual father (*discreta*), recount the exact number of times one committed the sin (*integra*), and go to confession as soon as possible after having committed the sin (*accelerata*), speak loud and clear for the priest to understand (*fortis*), accept the blame without making excuses for one's wrongdoing (*accusans*) while also accepting the priest's advice (*parere*).

Had it not been for two more points that present dilemmas particular to the galley space, the instruction book would have been no different than any other given to a chaplain on land. Cagliola, however, presented a moral dilemma that brings us back to the naval context of this sacrament, which is *Secreta* and *Lacrimabilis*.<sup>426</sup> With *secreta*, he discussed the need for the confession to be kept a secret, but secrecy outside the confessional was not as simple. Not only could a rower's confession be heard by those sharing the bench with him, but it was possible that an interpreter was needed for the penitent and the priest to understand each other. In this case, the penitent could choose whether to allow the presence of a third party or confess only his venial sins, eventually confessing the mortal ones when the opportunity of a priest who spoke his language presented itself. Seeing how they were on a war galley, *lacrimabilis* refers to the possibility that the penitent was injured and could not speak, in which case Cagliola said that it was licit to confess in writing or using gestures.

Even though the opus that Cagliola produced closely reflected the chapters in Borromeo's *Avvertenze per i Confessori*, the Jesuit influence on his work is undeniable. Flanking quotations from the 'Borromean' Martino Bonacina (1585-1631) in the margin notes, one finds references to renowned Jesuit moral theologians Antonio Possevino (1533-1611), Paul Laymann (1574-1635?), Thomas Sanchez (1550-1610), and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). In essence, Cagliola's was not an innovative enterprise, nor did he claim it to be such. Rather it was the adaptation to the Order's case of a literary genre that was readily accessible to the knights but not always pertinent to their environment. The difference between Cagliola's and later seventeenth-century works for Conventual Chaplains, such as the one produced by Fra Domenico Manso (1699),<sup>427</sup> is that Manso took a more pragmatic stance. In contrast,

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<sup>426</sup> AIM, Misc. 55, f.151v.

<sup>427</sup> N.L.M., MS 211.

Cagliola's approach was more intellectual, based in moral theology, as reflected by the sources he quoted. It is clear that Cagliola's Jesuit sources were all acclaimed exponents of the Probabilist school in moral theology, thereby reflecting the early influence of the Jesuit college on Hospitaller chaplains, as well as the frequent contact with acclaimed Jesuit scholars of the calibre of Athanasius Kircher visiting the island.<sup>428</sup> Albeit not a Jesuit innovation, the early modern society of Jesus became strongly associated with Probabilism, the reason being that they often found themselves administering sacraments in places and with people that caused missionaries a great deal of moral dilemmas.<sup>429</sup> This Jesuit influence on Hospitallers in terms of theology and matters of conscience has often been given secondary importance compared to the political role that the Jesuits had in Malta. Paradoxically, the Jesuits were sent away from Malta for the first time during the reign of a Jesuit-trained, ex-Camerata Grand Master Lascaris, because of their political involvement,<sup>430</sup> yet scholars like Cagliola exemplify the long-term spiritual impact of the Jesuits, a testament to the efficacy of their pedagogical strategy.

Even though, in the typical style of confessors' manuals, Cagliola's work owes much of its form to Borromeo's *Avvertimenti*, there is little indication that the naval chaplain wanted to produce an adaptation of Borromeo. In this sense, the Jesuit stance mirrored by Cagliola could be understood as a toned-down version of Borromeo's rigour. The limited success that confessors had in the decades between Borromeo's death and the time of Cagliola's work towards the mid-seventeenth century might have prompted a more persuasive than punitive approach, with confessors' manuals representing that balance between admonition and gentleness, particularly in places and circumstances that were particularly challenging. The lack of direct mention of Borromeo might sustain Giovanni Romeo's observation on the confessional direction in seventeenth-century Italy. He wrote that 'one thing is to prompt in record time the canonisation [of Carlo Borromeo] and another to entertain his unsustainable measures imposed in his Milanese ecclesiastical province in those frenetic twenty years

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<sup>428</sup> Zammit-Ciantar, Joe. "Athanasius Kircher in Malta." *Studi Magrebini* 23 (1991), 23-44; Waddell, Mark, 'The World, As It Might Be: Iconography and Probabilism in the *Mundus subterraneus* of Athanasius Kircher' *Centaurus*, Vol. 48, Issue 1 (January 2006), 3-21.

<sup>429</sup> On Probabilism and the Jesuits see: Tutino, Stefania, *Uncertainty in Post-Reformation Catholicism: A History of Probabilism* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017), 52-88.

<sup>430</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, 'Knights, Jesuits, Carnival and the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Malta', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 2012), 571-596.

during which he was bishop: already in the wake of his death, these were calmly ignored in the same Milan, with the open consensus of the pertinent Roman Congregation.<sup>431</sup> The galley as a sacred space was not just unconventional, it often presented more dilemmas than solutions, contrary to what the Tridentine sacred space was expected to do. In this sense, David Allen highlights, the moral dilemmas were neither resolved by Cagliola nor by Fra Domenico Manso's 1699 follow-up treatise, not even by an additional work written by Fra Camillo Spreti in 1764 for his novice nephew,<sup>432</sup> a clear sign of the way the space itself, isolated between sky and water, resisted efforts to sacramentalise daily life for those onboard.

### ***Conclusion***

In Hospitaller sacred spaces, homogeneity was rarely implied from the beginning. In most cases, it was an afterthought. Even spaces such as the Oratory of St John's that appear homogenous and are built with a specific intent in mind, were, in fact, a product of decades of compromise and adaptation to circumstances that were not always grounded in spirituality. The implication is that if the sacrality of spaces were to be considered based on how much this 'body' presented a unified exhortation to *metanoia*, then it would be most correct to talk of a sanctification in stages. Even attempts to create spaces of homogeneity such as the Camerata resulted in great contention and possibly a rupture in the very unity of the Order at large. One might also argue that the spiritual programme in Valletta was never complete, despite how intricate it might appear. Firstly, the concept of creating a New Jerusalem was not restricted to an architectural ideal that followed a specific timeframe, but rather related to a constant state of refashioning. Second, because the sacralisation of daily life involved the individual as much as the institution, it rested, therefore, on the patronage of the individual members of the Order *pro tempore*, as much as it depended on the institution to provide an opportunity for that patronage.

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<sup>431</sup> Romeo, Giovanni, 'Confessione dei peccati e confessor nell'Italia della controriforma: cosa dire del seicento?', *Studi Storici*, Anno 51, no.4 (Ott-Dic 2010), 975.

<sup>432</sup> N.L.M., MS. 1202, ff.155-201.

A second observation concerns the head of this body. Theologically, Christ was the head of the body, and canonically the Pope was the head, but in everyday practice, the Grand Master was the head of the Order. In both the promotion of cult as well as the creation of spaces, the role of the Grand Master (or the absence of it) in shaping the concept of holiness in the Order needs to be given its due merit. For instance, the cult of St Ursula obtained visibility in Malta when Grand Master Verdalle built a female monastery in Valletta which he dedicated to this saint.<sup>433</sup> The nuns continued to celebrate her feast long after the death of Verdalle.<sup>434</sup> The personal affinity of a Grand Master and his efforts to promote it often provided the inspiration for others to follow suit, often giving gravitas to the same cults. In 1693, more than a century after Verdalle's patronage, the Prior of the Conventual Church, Viani, made a request to the Congregation of Rites to celebrate the liturgical Office of four saints in St John's,<sup>435</sup> principally that of St Ursula with the appropriate readings for the Hospitaller breviary.<sup>436</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century, the contributions of Grand Masters Wignacourt, Lascaris and Carafa have emerged as being the most substantial, even though the differences in their approach are certainly worthy of a much lengthier discussion. What the above study has proposed is that although one cannot speak of a progression or linear growth from the Borromean era to the start of the eighteenth century, each period presented different challenges to each one of these actors ranging from jurisdictional issues to matters of internal reform. This had a clear influence on how they perceived sacred space.

A final observation concerns the uniqueness of the Hospitaller sacred space, specifically what sets the Order apart from all other religious orders. We have seen the Order struggle with internal reform, risking its very existence at every turn and consequently giving the impression that creating spaces to sanctify its members was not a priority, and maybe it truly was not. Whilst the Order's mission – *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum* – was never in doubt, there was a lacuna when it came to expressing it in a spiritual charisma. As a result, individuals within the Order sought to address that shortcoming themselves, if not to provide a solution for the entire organisation, at least as a means of expressing their own vocation.

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<sup>433</sup> Dal Pozzo I, 243 (1583)

<sup>434</sup> A.A.V., S.S. *Malta*, Vol 26, f.70 v, (October 1670).

<sup>435</sup> St Roche, St Ursula, St Lazarus and St Barbara.

<sup>436</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235, f.130-133; The matter dragged on for three years until the Congregation of Rites identified the readings in the breviary of the Capuchin order and assigned those to the Hospitallers as well.

They sometimes turned to other institutions and frequented their sacred spaces, or even created more space for new communities. The greatest beneficiary of this pluri-communitarian approach was the Order of St John, as some of those influences permeated into the Hospitaller spaces. For more than a century, the Order's Council relied on enterprising individuals to lead its interpretation of Trent by taking the initiative in addressing spiritual, devotional or charitable lacunas. What emerges is an understanding of the Order that was in all effects a microcosm of the Universal Church, both specific and wide-ranging.





### Chapter 3 – Absent Presence

In her study on the *Miraculous Flying House of Loreto*, Karin Vélez raised a common problem faced by historians when writing about the supernatural, namely the difficulty in talking about movement, in explaining how religious materiality is replicated, and in discerning the lasting appeal that these seemingly implausible stories retained for generations.<sup>437</sup> 'Instead of addressing real movement, most scholars...have brought to bear the analytical apparatuses from their respective disciplines that are usually mustered for the special situation of confronting the impossible.'<sup>438</sup> One solution lies in addressing the sources' sweeping claims that the agency surrounding these cults is real by asking what is moving, how is it being done and why it is moving. Walter Capps argued that religious studies needed to focus on movement, to represent the dynamics of time, change and motion; '...religious traditions are non-static or monolithic phenomena, but find their constantly changing and shifting identity in contact and relationship with each other.'<sup>439</sup> He called this the 'kinetic' approach. There are various ways to interpret and unravel what this kineticism consists of, from an anthropological, emotional, recollective and philosophical angle, and this chapter will consider a few of these approaches by engaging with the meaning of the word 'kinetic'.

These next few pages will be dedicated to movement; spaces that move the soul, images that move miraculously, the movement of relics, mystical power that moves through objects, and people who move to experience them. In this setting, space and objects become intertwined and interdependent, as both contribute to a more vivid experience. In this chapter, these concepts will be intertwined and reliant on each other. At times the space will be more prominent, while at other times, the object will take centre stage. The objective is not to show how the knights were different, at least in this aspect, but rather that they were part of a wider, kinetic, Catholic devotional world, at times as protagonists, other times as imitators or

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<sup>437</sup> Vélez, Karin, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto, Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton U.P., 2019), 11.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>439</sup> *Religion, Violence, Memory and Place*, Baruch Stier and Landres (eds.), (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 2006), 4; op. cit. Capps, Walter, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 339.

receptors. A central notion that I will expand upon is the meditative technique of using the 'eye of the soul' to perceive spaces and objects in ways that transcend what the physical eye sees, thus inviting the faithful to accept narratives of agency in objects and spaces which move the soul.

One way of moving the soul could be through an 'absent presence', meaning a holiness in a space or object that was produced by another, distant or past sacred entity. The idea to dedicate a chapter to absent presences comes from Padre Maletta's letter to Carlo Borromeo in 1582. After the overview he gave of the activities of the Camerata and the personal merits of Grand Master Verdalle, Maletta saw it fit to mention that the Grand Master was kind enough to show him 'the Treasure', meaning the relics 'brought from Jerusalem when it [the Order] was forced to leave'.<sup>440</sup> Even though most of the Order's relics were acquired later, the reference to Jerusalem served to both give legitimacy to the relics as well as use them to evoke a memory of the Order's own absent-presence. Maletta told Borromeo,

'I thought of you during that spiritual consolation...and having been given a few rings to touch to those sacred relics, especially a good part of the wood from the Holy Cross of Our Lord, and the three fingers of St John the Baptist...which rings...serve as a remedy from *malcaduco* (epilepsy) and against insect bites... I thought I wanted to send one to you...'<sup>441</sup>

In essence, the power emanating from Christ and the saints passes through the relics to the rings and, eventually, their bearer.

In continuation with previous chapters, this discussion will also contribute to the crossover between the Borromean and Jesuit influences, which became increasingly prominent in the years between Borromeo's and Loyola's canonisations (1610-1622). In the absence of the

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<sup>440</sup> B.A.M, F62 INF., f.376r., 15 March 1582.

<sup>441</sup> B.A.M, F62 INF., f.376r., 15 March 1582. *'Io mi raccordai di lei in quella consolatione spirituale et cosi non potendo fargline altra parte essendomi stato dato certi aneletti da far toccar quelle sacre Reliquie spetialmente una buona parte del legno della santissima croce di N. Signore, et le tre dita di San Giovanni Battista con li quali mostro il salvatore dicendo Ecce Agnus Dei, quali aneletti si come questi Signori e tutti il popolo per longo spatio di tempo hanno sperimentato a chi li porta con fede, riverenza et divotione servono per rimedio del malcaduco (epilepsy) e contra il ranfo (insect bites): mi risolsi di volerne uno per mandarglielo quale le sara dato in mio nome per mano del nostro molto reverendo padre Generale...'*

instructions that Borromeo sent to the knights with Padre Maletta<sup>442</sup> for the reform of Hospitaller spirituality, one can look at the devotions and methods of prayer that Borromeo promoted in the latter part of his life, namely the period 1578-1584, which coincided with the years of his closer involvement in the Order's affairs. He was a promoter of the Ignatian exercises, particularly the stage of spatial awareness (*compositio loci*), which highlights the importance of meditation as an exercise in mental discipline that could be achieved with the help of images and spaces. While the previous chapters dealt with the necessity for religious direction in the Order and the provision of spaces and people to provide spiritual assistance in the various environments where a knight was expected to serve, the case studies in this chapter will attempt to build the world of absent presences that surrounded them. As this section will demonstrate, the Hospitallers were not unique in their meditative exercises but rather were heavily influenced by regional or territorial cults present in their place of origin.

### ***Compositio loci***

*"Ultimately, perception of time and space was not entirely dependent on physical movement. Rather, it was affected profoundly by interior disposition."*<sup>443</sup>

Despite the growing efforts to regulate both art and architecture during the counter-reformation, the medieval longing for spaces and objects that could elicit *metanoia*, an internal sentimental transformation, remained prevalent. Spaces and objects have some impact on human processes and behaviour, and it was this idea that ultimately brought about the spatial and material turns in history.<sup>444</sup> The transformation that this chapter is concerned with is the role of sacred spaces and images in bringing about conversion, not merely in the

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<sup>442</sup> A.A.M, F62 INF., f.376, 15 March 1582; '... [i cavalieri vivono] *con osservanza de lor voti l quali attendo alli suoi [Borromeo] essercitii spirituali in casa tra di loro...*'

<sup>443</sup> Ditchfield, 'Reading Rome as a Sacred Landscape ca.1586-1635', *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, Coster and Spicer (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005), 189.

<sup>444</sup> Bennett, Tony and Joyce, Patrick (eds.) *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

denominational form, say from Islam to Christianity, but in the wider spiritual sense to mean a change of heart or repentance. This study presents spirituality as not reserved exclusively for the pious, but a lens through which members of the Order, saints and sinners, interacted with the world. Thus, the way space and images encourage this change in behaviour is of direct interest to us. Marcocci, Maldavsky, de Boer, Pavan, and others wrote of the changing idea of the self that resulted from *metanoia*, the sense of religious belonging that space can give.<sup>445</sup> If space is what space does,<sup>446</sup> then that which makes a space sacred is the sense of oneself that one gets when being there; knowing who you are or what you aspire to be, the *compositio loci*.<sup>447</sup>

In the *Disavventure Marinaresche di Gabriello*,<sup>448</sup> a semi-fictional work written by the Hospitaller chaplain, Fra Fabrizio Cagliola,<sup>449</sup> we are given the very same idea of space for self-awareness expressed in the aspiration of the young protagonist, Gabriello, who seeks guidance on how to become a conventual chaplain. The conversation between the aspiring Hospitaller and the Master of Novices takes place in the Oratory of St John's, beneath the fresco that showed knights and chaplains of the Order being butchered to death during the siege of 1565. The implication was that the true vocation for a member of the Order was to sacrifice one's life in the service of the faith, and the Oratory was organised in such a manner that brought about this *metanoia* in the hearts of the novices while being a tool for the masters who wanted to impart it. The inner dimension of the self is often where the larger spiritual battles took place, and this influenced the gradual definition of the notion of 'self'.<sup>450</sup>

Fra Zummo described a similar internal battle in one of the letters he wrote to the nuns of Palermo:

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<sup>445</sup> See: Marcocci, de Boer, Maldavsky and Pavan (eds.), *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 5.

<sup>446</sup> Ditchfield, *Reading Rome*, 189.

<sup>447</sup> Coster and Spicer, *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005), 3.

<sup>448</sup> A[rchives of the] C[athedral of] M[dina], Misc. 262.

<sup>449</sup> Author of the instructions for Hospitaller chaplains serving on board the Order's galleys, mentioned in Chapter 2 in relation to the Eucharistic theology.

<sup>450</sup> Marcocci et. al., *Space and Conversion* (2015), 5; A theme that was widely explored in Prosperi, Adriano (ed.) *Salvezza delle anime, disciplina dei corpi: un seminario sulla storia del battesimo* (Pisa: Edizione della Normale, 2006).

‘so that you could proceed to victory against that enemy called self-love, or better, self-poison; upon whom you will certainly triumph, if after the first battles you will call to your aid the General of the army of God, called self-contempt. He will come on behalf of his Lord, but first he will send you his three brave captains called, nothing having, nothing knowing and nothing wanting. These will train you in the use of arms, unravel the pitfalls, prepare the countermines, and rest assured that as long as you follow their orders, you will always be victorious. [The battle] will be cruel because you have enemies within that will spy on you and betray you, and these are your very senses.’<sup>451</sup>

On the other hand, turning to the external, historians have often singled out urban spaces in general or specialised structures within these cities that served to elicit *metanoia*.<sup>452</sup> Although the provision of contemplative spaces is not an exclusive phenomenon of the early modern period, the Counter-Reformation brought a reinforced vigour and focused expertise of dedicated institutions to sacralise cities through general conversion strategies such as that of Borromeo. Borromeo also promoted remote places in the wilderness such as the Sacro Monte di Varallo for the same purpose.<sup>453</sup>

Be it urban or remote, De Silva defined sacred as any space where, ‘within the bounds of appropriate activities, Christians could transcend the distractions of mortal life and enter into an environment that privileged their own spiritual growth and interaction with the saints and even God himself.’<sup>454</sup> If one objective of this study is to present spirituality as a lens through which the individual within the Order perceived the world, then the natural question that

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<sup>451</sup> Zummo (1742), 2; ‘...per poter passare innanzi ad ottenere la vittoria di quell nemico chiamato Amore proprio, o per più meglio dire, veleno proprio; del quale al sicuro trionferete, se dopo vinte le prime battaglie, chiamerete in vostro aggiunto il Generale dell’Esercito di Dio, che ha per nome, Odio di se stesso. Verra’ egli come zelante del suo Signorel però prima vi manderà in soccorso tre suoi valorosi Capitani chiamati, niente avere, niente sapere, e niente volere. Questi vi avvezzeranno alle armi, vi scuopriranno le insidie, faranno le contromine e siate che sicure che mentre eseguirete gli ordini loro, riuscirete sempre vittoriose. Sarà crudele perche avrete Nemici dentro, che vi fanno la spia, e vi ordiranno tradimenti: e sono I propri sensi vostri.’

<sup>452</sup> Some examples include Michelson, Emily, *Catholic Spectacle and Rome’s Jews: Early Modern Conversion and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2022); Alberts, Tara, *Conflict and Conversion: Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 2013); Diefendorf, Barbara, *Planting the Cross, Catholic reform and Renewal in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century France* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2019); Boillet, Élise, Rideau, Gaël (eds.) *La visibilité du religieux dans l’espace urbain de l’Europe moderne* (Rennes: Rennes U.P., 2021).

<sup>453</sup> Zanzi, Luigi, *Sacri Monti e Dintorni* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2005).

<sup>454</sup> De Silva, Jennifer Mara (ed.) *The Sacralization of Space and Behaviour in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 5; see also, Terpstra, Nicholas, *The politics of Ritual Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), 190-209.

follows concerns how far, if at all, the spaces detailed in Chapter 1 contributed to a spiritual growth. Historiography has provided us with a wide spectrum of methodologies that depart from the traditional chronological or geographical classifications in order to answer these questions. Some suggestions of a multi-faceted approach to sacred spaces and objects include: the study of the dynamics of connection, integration, and the hybridisation of human relationships; considering circularity and exchange across political and cultural borders; shifting focus from the macro to the micro levels; and including a multitude of viewpoints.<sup>455</sup> Some of the case studies that shall be considered further are informed by these methodologies. One example will focus on a Hospitaller Bishop of Malta who took it upon himself to promote the cult of his hometown near Montserrat, across borders, physically sponsoring chapels in Rome and Malta that recalled the Spanish cult.

In line with this, De Silva elaborated on this point by saying that the individual expects to experience a 'heightened state' when stepping beyond the threshold of the sacred.<sup>456</sup> A church, shrine, or sanctuary is not merely one central space but often involves smaller, more intimate areas where a particular ambience is created to trigger an emotional response in the individual.

The Oratory of the Beheading of St John within the Conventual Church complex is one such 'space within a space', meant to provoke a heightened state. The senses, such as smell and hearing, are invoked in varying manners to contribute to this heightened state.<sup>457</sup> Liturgical music for instance could be as effective in a certain setting as complete silence in another. Grand Master Wignacourt often claimed that music and singing conjured in him an idea of paradise.<sup>458</sup> Inquisitors often mentioned music in conjunction with liturgical celebrations in Malta. Inquisitor Angelo Ranuzzi (1668) wrote about music and sermons in the Oratory of St John on the occasion of the carnival exposition of the Holy Sacrament in 1666<sup>459</sup> and 1668.<sup>460</sup> That same year, Inquisitor Carlo Bichi (1668-1670) mentioned music on the feast of the late

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<sup>455</sup> Marocci et. al., *Space and Conversion* (2015), 7.

<sup>456</sup> De Silva, *The Sacralization of Space* (2015), 8.

<sup>457</sup> On Christianity as a sensory experience, see: Laven, Mary, *Mission to China, Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 227-248.

<sup>458</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 694.

<sup>459</sup> AAV, *S.S. Malta*, Vol. 21, f.46

<sup>460</sup> AAV, *S.S. Malta*, Vol. 24, f.41

Jesuit general Francesco Borgia,<sup>461</sup> Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Aragonese church of Pilar<sup>462</sup> and again for the feast of St Ursola.<sup>463</sup> Bichi also mentioned music in conjunction with the mass and the exposition of the sacrament on 10 November 1668, in a prayer for the galley squadron that was leaving to relieve Cerigo in Candia.<sup>464</sup> The smell of incense and burning candles elicit certain emotions, as well, since in Catholic liturgical practices, they are associated with a sacred presence. Crying, be it out of joy or contrition, is one indicator of the heightened state prompted by the sacred space. Works of sacred erudition that describe spaces and rituals in the early modern period, not least works that involve Hospitaller devotions such as Marc Antonio Haxiac's description of the procession with the relics to the Grotto of St Paul,<sup>465</sup> frequently mention this heightened state.

Historians have often overlooked the use of this language as merely propagandistic or an exaggeration, and that might be the case. However, descriptions of public acts of deep conversion, jubilation, and awe in front of a miracle must be understood as guarantees to the readers that they too would experience a similar emotional state. A shared heightened state is one of the most important hallmarks of community building for a religious community. The Order of St John, like most other religious orders, sought to enhance it with a structured programme of spiritual preparation, which included mandatory communion and confession,<sup>466</sup> catechetical literature, sermons and charity work<sup>467</sup> described in the previous chapters.

With the growing importance of the Jesuit *Collegium Melitensis*, the establishment of Hospitaller confraternities within the *Collegium* (the *Confraternita' dell'Immacolata*, in 1600, for instance), and the involvement of the Jesuits in the spiritual direction of the Camerata following the departure of the Barnabites, it is safe to assume that the catechetical literature

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<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 October, f.134

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, f.137

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, f.160

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, f.177.

<sup>465</sup> A[rchivium] C[athedralis] M[elitensis] – 32B Miscellanea, Vol. 10, 174

<sup>466</sup> AAV S.S. *Malta*, Vol. 25, f.54: On 24 March 1669, the vigil of the feast of the Annunciation, the vespers were accompanied by instrumental music, followed the next day with pontifical mass by the Grand Master, Grand Crosses in choir-ropes, and the general communion of novices.

<sup>467</sup> A.O.M. 1958 *Rituale della Maggior Chiesa* (1690) details this structural program of elaborate rituals. This topic will be dealt with extensively in the next section in relation to sacred materiality.

was a predominantly Ignatian as well, as already demonstrated in the manual of Fra Cagliola's naval chaplain. These would have included exponents of Jesuit image theory, such as Luis de la Puente (1554-1624), Antoine Sucquet (1574-1626), Jeronimo Nadal (1507-1580), Louis Richeome (1544-1625), and Herman Hugo (1588-1629). What all these had in common was the use of St Ignatius' *Exercitia Spiritualia* as groundwork to produce images, generally emblematic ones. The pedagogic element in the production of these images was not too distant from the plates in Verdalle's *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*, the key difference being that these images were also intended to serve the *compositio loci*. In its inception, the *Collegium Melitensis* served as both a seminary for the clergy as well as a school for the laity, particularly the knights, and therefore the use of images to stimulate mental exercises was easily applicable to both as, unlike texts, they do not necessitate prior in-depth knowledge on a particular topic.<sup>468</sup> There were various approaches to this, ranging from Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (1593), where the central figure in all images is always Christ, to Antoine Sucquet's *Via Vitae Aeterna* (1620), where the focus shifts to the individual or his soul.<sup>469</sup>

Both of these approaches utilise the so-called affective religious experience, a strategy to stimulate *compassio* or empathy through an immersion of the individual in the scene, similar to what Fra Zummo describes in his letters to the nuns of Palermo. This is, in sum, the manner through which images in carefully orchestrated settings could be deemed acceptable channels for meditation. Luis de la Puente's *Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra sancta fe* (1605) further added that the intellect can conjure images based on prior visualisation, thereby encouraging the frequent use of images.<sup>470</sup> In order not to let the mind wander, however, it was essential to follow the three stages of Ignatian meditation: the awareness of space and time (*compositio loci*) that would lead to self-awareness (*meditatio*), repentance, and finally, action (*praxis*). The use of images as an anchor in space and time will be delved into more deeply in the second section of this work which discusses the controversy involving the publication of images of Hospitaller saints. For now, it is sufficient to mention that despite

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<sup>468</sup> A methodology to discuss objects or images as ends in and of themselves and not as props for the written texts, as the Jesuit *emblemata* were intended to be used, is discussed by Riello, Giorgio, 'Things that shape history. Material culture and historical narratives', *History and Material culture. A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 24-46.

<sup>469</sup> Malý, Tomáš, 'The Logic of Jesuit Meditations: Antoine Sucquet's *Via vitae aeternae* (1620)', *Acta Comeniana* 30, LIV (2016), 156.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.



the flawless logic behind using images to conjure emotion, the main point of contention remained the distinction between worship by means of images and the veneration of the images themselves.<sup>471</sup> Although, at face value, it might seem like the suggestion of venerating images in Counter-Reformation Catholicism was verging dangerously close to idolatry, it became increasingly difficult to navigate around image veneration in cases where the representation itself seemed to be capable of doing mystical things, as will be discussed in the Hospitaller examples of the moving Madonnas.

In essence, the end of the sixteenth and the first decade of the seventeenth century saw a greater centrality of images and the spaces they inhabited, in Catholic devotional polemics. Whilst moralists largely agreed on the didactic and decorative use of images, the dispute on the *cultus* raged on,<sup>472</sup> in parallel rather than in response to Protestant criticism. De Boer also adds that part of understanding how an object could be seen with the interior eye is understanding when exactly in its lifespan it acquires a sacred status. There was a distinction to be made between the art when it was for sale in the artist's workshop, and the same object when placed in a setting intended for worship by the faithful.<sup>473</sup> In this, there seems to be a great difference between Christo-Marian images and those representing saints, with the former seemingly following a different set of rules than the latter. Irrespective of the great debates on images stirred by the Protestant Reformation, there seems to be little change in the way people behaved around them from the medieval to the early modern period. The viewer was encouraged to behave in a certain way in order to fully experience the images, such as kissing or touching them as if they were kissing or touching Christ himself. Consequently, images also became more graphic in their content as a way of drawing in the viewer.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> De Boer, Wietse, 'The Early Jesuits and the Catholic Debate about Sacred Images', *Jesuit Image theory*, de Boer, Enenkel and Melion (eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 58-59.

<sup>472</sup> De Boer, 'The Early Jesuits...', 63.

<sup>473</sup> De Boer, 'The Early Jesuits...', 63.

<sup>474</sup> Walker Bynum, Caroline, *Christian Materiality, An essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2011), 24.

### ***An exercise in imagination***

*“El sentimiento religioso se palpa, se respire y vive desde todos los espacios. Permea todos los sentidos”*<sup>475</sup>

This is how Antonio Carreño described early modern religious sentiment in Golden Age Spain; intense, breathable, and which permeates all spaces and senses. He was writing about the life and times of the poet and playwright Fra Lope Felix de Vega y Carpio (1562-1635), one of the most important exponents of literature and theatre of the Spanish Golden Age along with Cervantes, Quevedo, Góngora, and de la Barca; in life, he was arguably more popular and more industrious than all of them. Lope de Vega, who had enjoyed the patronage of the Church, took holy orders and eventually even became a conventual chaplain of Malta in 1627 as a result of the admiration that Pope Urban VIII Barberini nurtured for him.<sup>476</sup> Almost all his known portraits show him proudly brandishing the white, eight-pointed cross (*Fig.13*). He had aspired to become a member of the Order for more than two decades, a desire which is evidenced by his 1603 *El Valor de Malta* in which he glorified the Order’s fight against the Ottomans in the Mediterranean, However, Dal Pozzo specified that he could not as he had been married, twice. Despite his fascination with the military life and his many extramarital affairs, fathering several children, Lope was a deeply devout man. In this, he was not unlike many others, whose actions might appear less Christian than what their written word expresses. Yet, as Carreño illustrates, religion was a way of life, and Lope was no less dramatic in expressing his love of God than he was in other aspects of his life. He authored several spiritual works, chief among them *Las Rimas Sacras* (1615) and *Pastores de Belen* (1615), both a product of his personal contrition in the face of the loss of his favourite child.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Carreño, Antonio, “ Amor de dios en portugués sentido” *Las Rimas Sacras*, de Lope de Vega’ in Juan Olivares (ed), *Eros Divio. Estudios sobre la poesia religiosa iberoamericana del siglo XVII* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2012), 50.

<sup>476</sup> Dal Pozzo made a note about him under 1635, Dal Pozzo (1703), 839-840.

<sup>477</sup> On the *Rimas Sacras* see Carreño,49-78.



*Figure 13: Lope de Vega y Carpio (1562-1635) - Eugenio Caxés [attr.], coll. Valentin Carderera.*

Having lived in Madrid for most of his life, he had a strong personal devotion towards St Isidore Agricola (San Isidro Labrador),<sup>478</sup> patron of the city, who was beatified and canonised in Lope's lifetime and to whom the author dedicated some works. Furthermore, Spain in Lope's time was as much a breeding ground for saints as Italy was. He received his first education in the Jesuit College of Madrid in the wake of the growing cults of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier, which explains the Ignatian undertone of his spiritual works. Both Loyola and Xavier would also be canonised in Lope's lifetime, along with St Theresa of Avila, whose works Vega would have known, having been a close friend of her confessor, Bishop Sancho Dávila y Toledo.<sup>479</sup> To all these and other saints he dedicated sonnets in the *Rimas Sacras*.

So far, Fra Lope de Vega has been extensively studied for his literary and theatrical contribution, yet very few have chosen to consider his spiritual works as expressions of Tridentine spirituality, much less as part of a wider discussion on his works as tools for personal meditation on the Ignatian model.<sup>480</sup> Lope is of interest to the present study on Hospitaller spirituality because of one of his small, little-known works which highlights precisely how far Catholic religiosity in early modern Europe needs to be understood as an air 'that permeated the senses'. Much of what will be detailed in this section was written by Lope in the immediate years preceding his entrance into the Order and would have certainly been known among his many Hospitaller friends, some of whom he hosted in his Madrid home, such as the Grand Prior of Castille Don Diego Brochero and the renown corsair Fra Alonso de Contreras.<sup>481</sup> In many ways, Lope's spirituality exemplifies what was prevalent among Spanish knights such as the Navarrese Fra Bernardo d'Espelta or the Castillian Fra Gonsalvo de Porres

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<sup>478</sup> His non-universal cult was approved in 1619, eventually canonized in 1622.

<sup>479</sup> To Sancho Dávila, Lope dedicated a long sonnet in the *Rimas Sacra*, thanking and praising him for his volume on the 'Veneration due to the Bodies and relics of Saints' (Madrid, 1611); see Vega y Carpio, Lope, *Rimas Sacras*, (Lerida: Luis Manescal, 1615), 79. Bisop Dávila has been described as the personification of the counter-reformation movement in post-Tridentine Spain by Jacobo Sanz Hermida, Antonio Irigoyen Lopez and Jose Jesus Garcia Hourcade. On the relic collection and patronage of Dávila in Salamanca, see; Sanz Hermida, Jacobo, 'Un coleccionista de reliquias: Don Sancho Dávila y el Estudio Samantino', *Via spiritus* 8 (2001), 59-93; on Tridentine reforms see; Irigoyen Lopez, Antonio and Garcia Hourcade, Jose Jesus, 'Aplicaciones Tridentinas: la Visita del obispo Sancho Dávila al cabildo de la catedral de Murcia (1592)' *IH* 22 (2002), 11-22.

<sup>480</sup> With the exception of Antonio Carreño, who gives a detailed study of literary and artistic works on the Via Crucis and the meditation of the Passion of Christ: Carreño, Antonio, 'El Romancero Espiritual de Lope de Vega', *Boletín de la Biblioteca de Menéndez Pelayo*, año 55 (enero-diciembre, 1979), 19-63,

<sup>481</sup> *The life of Capitan Alonso de Contreras, Knight of the Military Order of St John, Native of Madrid, written by himself (1582 to 1633)*, translated by Catherine Alison Phillips (Kessinger Legacy Reprints, no date), 222-223.

and Fra Giovanni Vargas, and the Catalan Fra Tommaso Gargallo, who were protagonists in the Jesuit establishment in Malta. Lope's sonnets can be easily placed at an intersection between Spanish Counter-Reformation spiritualities, Hospitaller ambitions, learned environments, and great works of patronage.

A few copies of a book titled *Romancero Espiritual* have been identified; a small book that claims to connect the soul to God through a meditation of the *Via Crucis*.<sup>482</sup> The earliest version of this volume has not survived, but subsequent editions carry the dates 1624, 1673, and 1720,<sup>483</sup> which indicates that the publication enjoyed considerable popularity in Navarre and Madrid, where it was consistently reprinted. Some of these later editions were printed in pocket-version, which also suggests its use as a devotional *vadamecum*.<sup>484</sup> What is unusual about this volume when compared to other works by Vega is that the form is substantially different, even from the *Rimas Sacras*, from which many of the sonnets are taken. Carreño argues that the reorganisation of the sonnets into a prayer book for a physical or a meditative ritual on the stations of the cross was an afterthought, still in Vega's lifetime, by using material that was recycled from what he had already published. In other words, these sonnets were not being published for their literary value but repurposed to serve a more practical devotional value, inviting the reader to interact with the content. The volume is divided into three sections: the first deals with the Infancy of Christ; the second with the Passion of Christ, recalling weeks two and three of the Ignatian exercises; and the third consists of a mixture of meditations and short prayers. The rhymes are direct, written in a colloquial and simple manner; yet in their simplicity, they are charged with pathos and dramatisation. Vega does not get lost in dogma, nor complex teachings such as God made flesh, the Trinity, or the Virgin Mother of God. He instead gives concrete and tangible reflections taken from daily life.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> Vega y Carpio, Lope, *Romancero Espiritual a devocion de los Hermanos de la Tercera Orden del Serafico Padre San Francisco Para recrearse el alma con Dios y redempcion del genero humano con las estaciones de la via Crucis* (Pamplona: Juan de Oteyza 1624).

<sup>483</sup> The latest editions were published as late as 1778 and 1890. Others have no date, such as one published in Segovia, and another published in Valladolid. One belonged to the Marquiz of Jerez de los Caballeros. This shows the popularity of the volume throughout Spain, from Navarre to Extremadura, with it being most popular in Old Castille; Carreño (1979), 29; Carreño, Antonio, 'Perspectivas y Dualidades Pronomiales en el Romancero Espiritual de Lope de Vega', *Revista de Filologia Espanola*, Vol. LVIII no1 /4 (1976), 47.

<sup>484</sup> Carreño (1976), 48.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

The narrative sequence is quite simple and follows a pattern: first, he gives a spatial anchor (*compositio loci*), then he presents a dialogue between Christ and the Virgin or an apostle, and finally, he exhorts the reader to contrition in a rhetoric that directly addresses the soul as if it were personified. The build-up is enriched with symbols, biblical narratives, popular places, and devotional literature. The language alternates between putting the reader as an external spectator to the scenes and an internal witness, an effective tool that was frequently adopted in penitential literature. It was intended to make the reader feel compassion for Mary in her solitude and feel responsible for the pain suffered by Christ. This technique was typical of Ignatian meditation popularised by the *Spiritual Exercises*, which uses an imaginative process built on a real event and space to invite the reader to meditate on one's own past shortcomings (week one of the Exercises).<sup>486</sup>

To take one example, in the station when Christ bid farewell to his mother on his way to the crucifixion, the text starts with a description of the scene from the gospel (the historical event), that transforms into an imaginary conversation between mother and son, and then concludes with an address to the soul that exhorts it to turn to the Virgin and offer to accompany her in this imaginative walk after her son to the Golgotha. In other parts, he repeats the word 'without' to accentuate the solitude of Mary that is '*sin el hijo: sola*' (without her son, alone). This element of solitude is found frequently in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, both in reference to the Virgin Mary as well as to Christ himself, who alone had to suffer for the sins of others. Together they suffered alone, and together they are redeemers. In the scene when Christ is hit on his face by the soldier for having answered the high priest, Vega meditates on the shared pain of Mary who sees the lips of Christ 'whose milk they nurtured on, are now covered in blood'. Simple yet powerful thoughts with which every mother and every son could empathise.<sup>487</sup>

Towards the end of the *Romancero*, following the stations of the cross, there are more meditative sonnets. The first group are dedicated to the Eucharistic presence, followed by another three dedicated to the act of contrition and repentance (the tears of the soul, the

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<sup>486</sup> Carreño (1976), 50.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

soul and Christ her husband, the lost sheep), and finally, a chant and two hagiographic sonnets dedicated to St Ignatius Loyola at Montserrat and St Francis of Assisi. The devotional book concludes with the meditation of the stigmata of St Francis, a prayer to say every day of the week 'to be in the presence of God', and an examination of one's conscience with a final *Miserere*.

The rarity of having a written work that expresses the spiritual sentiments of a prospective member of the Order cannot be overstressed, even more so when written by someone as erudite as Lope who could elucidate his thoughts in such a distinct manner. Several points can be deduced from studying this work, the first being that when we speak of Hospitaller spirituality, we need to consider the contribution that members or aspiring members gave to the institution. There is no proof that Lope's work was commissioned by the Order. The work was reprinted several times, which proves its popularity, undoubtedly also among some Hospitaller confreres who formed part of his circle of friends. The spiritual thoughts of Hospitallers and what they shared between them are just as insightful as what the institution offered them, and Lope's work is a glimpse into how spirituality was a lens through which even troubled individuals viewed the world.

The world that Fra Lope de Vega presented in the *Romancero* is one charged with pathos and realism, despite space being an absent-presence. In de Certeau's terms, Lope chose to see the Passion of Christ through a perspective that no living eye could see. For this reason, one could follow Lope spatially on this journey in three distinct ways; by physically going to Jerusalem to meditate through the physical places where the events took place; by undertaking a short pilgrimage to a place closer to home; or by staying in one's reading room (or even an enclosed space like a galley or a cloistered monastery) and experience the whole journey solely through the imagination.

A final thought relates to the format of the work itself. Being divided into short sonnets dealing with a varied number of religious themes meant that one would not need to read the whole *opus* in one go. Quite the contrary, its effectiveness would be reached by reading only a small portion in conjunction with other orations. It provides a bite-size spirituality meant for everyday use. True to his primary profession, Lope expressed complex theological

concepts by means of a language typically used by playwrights for profane theatrical works. In this manner he could write about something as complex as the Eucharistic transubstantiation, taking fragments from various Eucharistic hymns such as the *Tantum Ergo*, but representing them in a language that could be easily understood by a less theologically inclined reader.<sup>488</sup>

An equally interesting and rare case study of this imaginative exercise as a means of spiritual meditation is a set of letters<sup>489</sup> written by Fra Giaime Zummo (1573-1642), a knight of Malta from Palermo,<sup>490</sup> to a group of Franciscan nuns in a cloistered Monastery he founded with his brother Fra Nicola (founded in 1627, cloistered from 1638).<sup>491</sup> These letters were written in a form similar to the pastoral letters that a bishop sent to his diocese on major feast days. They are proof of the efficacy of the meditative journeys, specifically when applied in scenarios where physical journeys are not possible, such as a cloistered monastery. Most of the letters are either written in the style of love letters from Christ, or else describe a vision that the knight had during his own meditation, inviting the reader could partake in the same vision: Aa Fra Zummo wrote in one of his letters: *'I am the baby Jesus departed from the crib without my mother noticing, having been sent by my father not to suck miraculous milk from the virginal breasts, but to nourish from the tears of converted sinners'*.<sup>492</sup> In another letter he sent them during Holy Week, which is of particular interest since it echoes what was discussed above in the context of Lope's work, Fra Zummo told the nuns that while he was meditating on Christ in the Gethsemane, he started to converse with him. He looked around and saw all the nuns of the monastery gathered around Jesus in the garden of olives. One was sleeping in Christ's arms like St John, others were drying the blood on his forehead with their veils, and others still kneeling next to him, crying.<sup>493</sup> The language invites the nuns to foster a personal affection towards Jesus as if they were the brides and Christ the groom.

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<sup>488</sup> Carreño (1976), 62.

<sup>489</sup> The letters were published on the centenary of his death in 1742 by the historian of the Order Don Sebastiano Pauli della Congregazione della Madre di Dio; Zummo, Giaimo, *Lettere Spirituali Scritte alle Reverende Monache di tutte le Grazie in Palermo...* (Napoli: Niccolò Naso, 1742).

<sup>490</sup> Dal Pozzo (1715), 71; 'Fra D. Niccolò e Fra D. Iaime Zumbo Fratelli di S.[anta] Vita'.

<sup>491</sup> Mongitore, Antonio, *Memorie Istoriche della Fondazione del Venerabil Monastero di S. Maria di tutte le Grazie nella città Palermo...* (Palermo: Domenico Cortese, 1710).

<sup>492</sup> Zummo (1742), 42.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.



It is even rarer to see some of these mental images represented in artistic form. In an Advent letter, Fra Zummo wrote:

‘as [spiritual] weapons, each one of you should carry a cross on their shoulders: your Mother Superior should go first, carrying another [cross] on her chest with a motto that reads, *absit nobis gloriari nisi in cruce*, that is, stay away from us who wants to be content and glorious, unless [they want to be so] through the Cross’.<sup>494</sup>

A painting that adorned the Convent Church of St Vito in Palermo, attributed to the Sicilian artist Pietro Novelli (1603-1647), shows precisely this scene. (Fig.14) The Virgin of Graces occupies the top quarter of the painting, surmounting an imaginary mount that rises outside the monastery walls. Nuns carrying crosses on their shoulders are seen climbing a path that leads to the Virgin, one even wearing a crown of thorns. Leading them at the top is their Mother superior, who upon reaching the pinnacle, kneels to collect the Virgin’s breastmilk, a typical iconography of Our Lady of Graces, in chalices. She can be observed spilling the allegorical graces which trickles downhill along the path that her consœurs are threading. Meanwhile, an angel shoots arrows at the hearts of the nuns as they make their way uphill, an allegory reminiscent of Bernini’s ‘Ecstasy of St Theresa’. In Catholic iconography, it is more accurately known as transverberation of the heart, representing the fire and love that an individual has nurtured for God figuratively piercing one’s heart. This is another theme that is very frequent in Zummo’s letters; ‘I can’t propose for you another remedy, other than that you may become fire. Because fire does not consume, but lights other fire...and wherever you go you should shout fire, fire, fire, because God burns with fire...’<sup>495</sup> ‘Let us die dear groom, let this night be the triumph of your birth, and when day breaks there will appear on these walls an epitaph that reads: Here lie twenty-six brides burned, and dead for love.’<sup>496</sup> The two

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<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 8; ‘e per arme ogn’una porti la sua Croce in ispalla: vada la vostra Madre avanti, e ne porti un’altra al petto che dica con un motto, *absit nobis gloriari nisi in cruce*, cioè, sia lontano da noi voler contenti e glorie, se non in Croce.’

<sup>495</sup> Zummo (1742), 31; ‘lo non saprei trovarvi altro rimedio, se non che ancor voi vi faceste di fuoco. Giache un fuoco non consuma, ma accende un altro fuoco...e per dove passerete andate gridando fuoco, fuoco, fuco, che Dio arde di fuoco...’

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; ‘Lasciateci morire caro Sposo, Sia questa notte un trionfo del vostro Natale, ed a fare del giorno si veggia in queste muraglia un Epitafio: Qui giacciono ventisei Spose arse, e morte per Amore.’

men at the bottom of the scene are quite possibly Fra Nicola and Fra Giaime Zummo, active participants in this heavenly vision.



Figure 14: *Our Lady of Graces*, Pietro Novelli (1603-47). Church of St Vito - Palermo

### ***Civitas Monte Repleta***

*“...Qui veda Gierusalemme chi non puo peregrinare.”<sup>497</sup>*

In Verdalle’s *Statuta Hospitalis*, the plate showing Valletta in 1588 stands out from the rest for showing a plan of the city rather than a scene like most of the other plates. Valletta is still missing some of its key buildings, though the plan does not come with a legend, so it is hard to decipher what is there and what is missing, as seen from so far up. The objective of its inclusion in the cycle of panels is in the caption: ‘VALLETTAE CIVITAS MONTE REPLETA’. (Fig.15) *Repleta* in this context can mean filled, restored, abounding; a double meaning to reflect both the complexity of the project, but also the flourishing city on a mount. Even though Valletta is no flat pasture, those who visit the city hardly feel like they are ascending a mountain. It is on mounts that God often speaks to his people: on Mount Horeb, he gave Moses the Ten Commandments, on Mount Carmel he summoned Elijah, Christ’s Transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor, while the Holy City itself was built on Mount Sion.<sup>498</sup> More importantly, Christ was crucified on the Calvary, a mount. The hope that Valletta would come to resemble one of these mounts, at least when seen with the eye of the soul, is also expressed in Anguiscola’s foundation sermon: ‘On the Holy Mount stands the city he founded.’<sup>499</sup> In this section, we shall consider the early modern fascination with the ‘civitas monte’ and its importance for meditative and spiritual journeys.

Throughout the Catholic lands, images of the crucified Christ were placed on hilltops and mountains in imitation of the Golgotha, eventually with the inclusion of other stops along the main path to the summit that recalled the stations of the cross. They became very popular in the fifteenth century, with some, like the ones in Piedmont and Lombardy, becoming

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<sup>497</sup> Inscription at the entrance of the Sacro Monte di Varallo: Gentili, Guido, *Sacri Monti* (Italy: Einaudi, 2019), 8.

<sup>498</sup> Korenjak, Martin, ‘Why Mountains Matter’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 70, n.1 (2017), 179-219.

<sup>499</sup> Anguiscola was quoting from Psalm 87 (86); Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze, Fondo Gino Capponi 37, MS 878, f.125-136; Zammit Ciantar, 12-13

increasingly distinct for their complexity and artistic beauty.<sup>500</sup> The physical exertion associated with the climb, coupled with the mental labour to visualise scenes of violence and suffering in the passion narratives were deemed complimentary in the transition from meditation to contemplation.

‘No one should think visiting the places to be a light task; there is the intense heat of the sun, the walking from place to place, kneeling, and prostration; above all, there is the strain that everyone puts on himself to earnest piety and comprehension of what is shown to him in the holy places, and to devout prayer and meditation, all of which cannot be done without great fatigue, because to do them fitly a man should be at rest and not rambling about. To struggle after mental abstraction whilst bodily walking from place to place is extremely toilsome.’<sup>501</sup>

This was also Carlo Borromeo’s final exertion; he died days after visiting the Sacro Monte di Varallo one last time in October 1584.<sup>502</sup> From all the *Sacri Monti*, Varallo in particular remained closely associated with Borromeo, who was pivotal for its revival in the 1570s and early 1580s. There, each station of the cross was fitted with an individual chapel, with passion episodes represented more vividly by means of polychromed life-size statues that had glass eyes, real hair and clothes.<sup>503</sup> The fact that each scene was called *statio*, from the Latin ‘to stop’, denotes the variation between motion and stillness that becomes an integral element in this form of meditation. Borromeo had a profound interest in the concept of stational worship and he also sought to export the Roman visit to the seven churches to Milan by designating seven churches in the city that the confraternities visited in procession once a month. Furthermore, he tried to replicate the stations with statues from the *Sacro Monti* in the church of San Sepolcro by having statuary groups in twenty-four ‘luoghi dei misteri’, small

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<sup>500</sup> Longo, Pier Giorgio, *Memorie di Gerusalemme e Sacri Monti in epoca barocca* (Ponzano Monferrato: Centro di Documentazione dei Sacri Monti, Calvari e Complessi Devozionali Europei, 2010).

<sup>501</sup> Quote from Felix Fabri’s 1480 Visit to the Holy Land: Terry-Fritsch, Allie, *Somaesthetic Experience and the Viewer in Medicean Florence: Renaissance Art and Political Persuasion, 1459-1580* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam U.P., 2020), 168.

<sup>502</sup> De Klerck, Bram, ‘Jerusalem in Renaissance Italy, The Holy Sepulchre on the Sacro Monte of Varallo’, *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, Goudeau, Verhoeven and Weijers (eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 215-217.

<sup>503</sup> Stuart (2017), 230.

chapels within the church.<sup>504</sup> Derek Moore described this as ‘stational urbanism’,<sup>505</sup> essentially transposing the stations of the cross over the city, while simultaneously undertaking a journey to Jerusalem by remaining stationary in Milan. Meanwhile, from the mid-sixteenth century, the Borromean direction at Monte Varallo was flanked by the patronage of the Adda family.<sup>506</sup> Subsequent descendants of the Adda family occupied the role of *fabbricieri* at Varallo, meaning they were overseers of the continuous elaboration of the *Sacro Monti* themes, albeit under the guidance of Borromeo’s successors, such as Carlo Bascapè bishop of Novara and Federico Borromeo bishop of Milan. One of these *fabbricieri* was the Hospitaller knight Fra Giorgio d’Adda (d. 1661) who was appointed to this prestigious post in 1614, two years after joining the Order.<sup>507</sup> The seventeenth-century chronicler of Varallo Gio Battista Fassola recorded the patronage of Fra d’Adda of the *Nuova Gierusalemme*, for instance, his donation of several relics to the *Veneranda Fabbrica*.<sup>508</sup> The same narrative present at Varallo was adapted to other *Sacri Monti* in the vicinity. At times, the focus shifted to a Marian narrative such as the one in Varese (1605) that had Rosary stations instead of Via Crucis ones, Orta (1591) that represented scenes from the life of St Francis, and after the canonisation of Borromeo in 1610, even a Sacro Monte in Arona, his hometown, that revolved around themes from Carlo’s life and works.<sup>509</sup>

Even though the imaginative exercise that placed the reader in a biblical scene with a holy figure was best developed by Ignatius Loyola, it was not a counter-reformation innovation.<sup>510</sup> Passion meditations in particular had been growing in popularity since the thirteenth century as a result of literary works such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which had contributed to the dissemination of several Passion-related cults, centred around both relics and prayer spaces.<sup>511</sup> A few years before the Council of Trent, the Dominican Luis de Granada published

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<sup>504</sup> Stuart (2017), 232.

<sup>505</sup> Moore, Derek, ‘Carlo Borromeo, Milan and the Sacri Monti’, *Zodiac Rivista internazionale d’architettura*, 9 (Milano: Edizioni di Comunita’, 1962), 32.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; Fecchio, Lorenzo, *Il ‘nuovo miglior ordine’ per il Sacro Monte di Varallo Sesia, Architettura, costurzione e amministrazione, 1560-1584* (Firenze: Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2019), 41-56.

<sup>507</sup> Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 198-199.

<sup>508</sup> Fassola, Gio Battista, *La Nuova Gierusalemme o sia il Santo Sepolcro di Varallo* (Milano: Federico Agnelli, 1671), 45, 55-57.

<sup>509</sup> Moore, 36-39.

<sup>510</sup> Sieuw, Tsafra, ‘Translations of the Jerusalem Pilgrimage Route at the Holy Mountains of Varallo and San Vivaldo’, *Between Jerusalem and Europe*, Bartal and Vorholt (eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 113-132

<sup>511</sup> Including some from Christ’s infancy such as the Holy Cradle, the swaddle, and the Virgin’s milk.

*De Modo Orandi* (1539-40), in which the monk compared human misery to the sufferings of Christ on the cross. It is not a coincidence that Fray Luis wrote this work after having visited the monastery of Scala-Coeli in Córdoba, where the monks had built a small Golgotha Garden, transforming that space into a miniature Jerusalem, including the main sites from Christ's passion.<sup>512</sup> A similar work produced by Ludolf of Saxony<sup>513</sup> at the dawn of the sixteenth century was pivotal for the transformation of the Catalan shrine of Montserrat into a physical space that could serve as a place where one could meditate the Passion.<sup>514</sup>

Montserrat had a great impact on pilgrims, particularly on Ignatius Loyola himself, who ascended the mount and left his sword there, symbolically turning his life around and eventually producing his spiritual exercises. Just like in Lope de Vega's *Romancero*, the theme of the holy mount of Montserrat revolves around the seven joys and seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary, through the symbolic but also physical path that leads to the main sanctuary. Sacred Histories of Montserrat, such as Pere de Burgos' *Libro d'los Milagros hechos a invocación de nra señora de Montserrate* (1536) create an indelible link between the miraculous occurrences, the piety of the visitors and the space itself.<sup>515</sup> Lily Arad described the Jerusalem undertone that ties the various spaces of the Montserrat complex as an 'absent presence'; that '*immaterial, invisible factor that organizes words, sounds, images and any other mediation vehicle into something meaningful*'.<sup>516</sup> In many ways, it is this desire to create this absent presence that inspired Ignatius Loyola to formulate his meditative technique. It was, in turn, the Ignatian influence in Lope de Vega's formation that led to an immersive guide for pilgrims, undoubtedly a literature that complimented a visit to the Catalan shrine. In Montserrat and in the Italian Sacro Monti, and equally in Lope's work, Mariology and Christology were combined to present a narrative that influenced devotional behaviour.

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<sup>512</sup> Carreño (1976), 23.

<sup>513</sup> Ludolfo de Sajona, *Vitae Christi* (Alcala: 1502-3)

<sup>514</sup> Carreño (1979), 22; Arad, Lily. 'An Absent presence: Jerusalem in Montserrat' *Miscellània litúrgica catalana* (2012), 345-382,

<sup>515</sup> Arad, 346.

<sup>516</sup> Arad, 348-9; Arad explains that Jerusalem is 'invisibly' present in Montserrat, even beyond the obvious presence of relics and copies of sacred art: the shape of the mount itself was reminiscent of the Golgotha; there was a belief that the image of the Virgin had been crafter by St Luke in Jerusalem; and it was believed that the image was buried in a cave and discovered when the cave split, much like when the earth split with the death of Jesus.



In most such places one finds the cult revolving around a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, believed to intercede not only to save the immaterial soul but also the tangible body. The symbiosis between the miraculous image and the place was generally reflected in the creation of a new dedication that mirrored either the place or the narrative of these images. So instead of having the universal dedication of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Annunciation, Our Lady of Sorrows or the Ascension, we have the particular dedication of *Nuestra Señora de Montserrat*, *Notre Dame de Liesse*, *Our Lady of Damascus* or *Philermos*, or the *Madonna di Loreto* or *Trapani*. In order to understand the strong ties that these cults had with their place of origin, we need to study how they were exported and translated away from home.

Late sixteenth-century Rome was bustling with pilgrims, particularly in years when there was a short hiatus in the religious wars. Weary from their journey, some pilgrims needed medical attention and hospitality. Long before the Sistine reorganisation of Rome towards the end of the sixteenth century, the city was blessed with several hospitals and hospices that gave shelter to pilgrims. For practical reasons, a number of these institutions provided services in a particular language.<sup>517</sup> Consequently, several national churches were also present, enriched by the donations of grateful pilgrims. Perhaps the most popular with tourists even in the present day is the church of *San Luigi dei Francesi*, renowned for the Caravaggio paintings of St Matthew. Despite the later Maltese link with Caravaggio, I will focus here instead on the less popular though no less important *chiesa di Montserrat degli Spagnoli*, originally the church for Aragonese pilgrims. These national churches often exported regional devotions to the hub of Catholicism in Rome, providing the pilgrims with a familiar devotional model while at the same time exposing visitors from other nationalities to particular regional devotions. This was also the case in the *Chiesa degli Spagnoli* with its chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Montserrat. Upon closer inspection, one notices that, apart from the link with the Catalan shrine, this chapel is decorated with the insignia of the Order of Malta, both the flag and the eight-pointed cross. Conspicuous also is the presence of St John the Baptist holding the battle standard of the Order in the *lanterna* at the centre of the vaulted ceiling of this chapel.

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<sup>517</sup> On the hospitals as a space for conversion in early modern Rome, see: Fosi, Irene, 'The Hospital as a Space for Conversion; Roman Examples from the Seventeenth Century' in *Space and Conversion in a Global Perspective*, De Boer, Marcocci, Maldavsky (eds.) (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 154-174; *Identità e rappresentazione; Le chiese nazionali a Roma*, Koller and Kuberky-Piredda (eds.) (Roma: Campisano Ed., 2015).



Figure 15: Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat, Chiesa degli Spagnoli – Rome.  
Above: the lantern with St John, the arms of the Order and Gargallo and  
eight-pointed crosses, Below: Fresco of Montserrat





(Fig. 16) The outer frame of the chapel is indeed topped with the coat of arms of Fra Tommaso Gargallo, one of the most senior members of the Order in the last quarter of the sixteenth century<sup>518</sup> and the longest-serving Bishop of Malta (d. 1614).<sup>519</sup> Gargallo was born in Collbató, a small village at the foot of the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, where he also received his initial education. His father also appears to have owned a pilgrim refuge in the village.<sup>520</sup> It seems Gargallo never missed an opportunity to disseminate this devotion to his hometown wherever he was based, including Malta. Apart from his patronage of the national church in Rome, he was responsible for erecting at least two other altars under the same dedication, as well; one in the old conventual church of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa<sup>521</sup> and another in the Jesuit church of Valletta.<sup>522</sup> His direct intervention in favour of the establishment of the Jesuits was a milestone in the efforts to make Malta conform with the decrees of Trent, namely since the *Collegium Melitense* was also intended to serve as a seminary for Maltese clergy. This context adds weight to the cult of Montserrat in Malta, thanks to this patronage of Gargallo.<sup>523</sup> He was later buried in this chapel before his spoils were exhumed by his nephew to be buried in his beloved Collbató.<sup>524</sup> His sponsorship of a new chapel to the Virgin of Montserrat in Rome is especially significant since it is somewhat representative of Gargallo's spiritual *curriculum vitae*, combining both his Catalan origins and

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<sup>518</sup> Gargallo was a chaplain of the Order and from 1573 vice-chancellor during La Cassiere's magistracy. He was elected bishop in 1577 following the death of his predecessor, Fra Martin Royas, who had been the Order's delegate at the Council of Trent. Gargallo was awarded the Bishopric at the expense of the Prior of the Conventual Church, Fra Antonio Cressino, as well as the Vice-Prior Fra Jean Mosquet. This choice would prove detrimental for La Cassiere. See: Dal Pozzo, I, 147; Zammit, William, *Fra Thomas Gargallo, Bishop of Malta: A study of the Bishop's relations with the various authorities in Malta* (unpublished Bachelor of Arts Dissertation, University of Malta, 1987), 7; Russo, (2017).

<sup>519</sup> Almost thirty-six years of episcopate: Russo, 108.

<sup>520</sup> Canalda Llobet, Sílvia, 'L'iconografia della Santa Immagine in Santa Maria in Monserratoa Roma: un incontro tra l'identità catalana e castigliana tra il XVI e il XVII secolo', *Identità e rappresentazione; Le chiese nazionali a Roma*, Koller and Kuberky-Piredda (eds.) (Roma: Campisano Ed., 2015), 70.

<sup>521</sup> The church of St Lawrence was enlarged at the end of the seventeenth century and the Gargallo altar was also refurbished. The original painting that showed the bishop himself kneeling next to the Virgin with Montserrat in the background was replaced, with the original moved to the sacristy. It has since gone lost, but fortunately we have a photograph from 1928 thanks to the article by Inguanez, Mauro, 'Cappelle dedicate alla Madonna di Monserrato nell'Isola di Malta', *Analecta Montserratensia*, vol. VII (1928), 367-373.; Canalda Llobet, Sílvia, 'La promoció artística del bisbe de Malta, Tomàs Gargallo (†1614): autoritat, política i devoció', *Manuscripts. Revista d'Història Moderna*, 41 (2020), 45-68.

<sup>522</sup> The original painting was replaced with one attributed to Giuseppe d'Arena showing the Virgin in conversation with St Francis Xavier and St Ignatius Loyola.

<sup>523</sup> The matter had also directly contributed to the construction of the parish church of the Shipwreck of St Paul in Valletta in 1609, coinciding with the resurgence of the cult in the Rabat Grotto: Russo, 105.

<sup>524</sup> The sepulchral stone still survives next to the altar of Montserrat in Valletta: Canalda Llobet (2015), 70.

his Hospitaller career. Furthermore, Canalda y Llobet discusses the possibility that the Roman chapel was Gargallo's own atonement after having caused the death of two Cathedral canons who disobeyed him, with the patronage standing-in for a penitential pilgrimage to Montserrat, which the bishop could not do due to his old age.<sup>525</sup> Two frescoes decorate the chapel, one showing St Raymond of Peñafort, the first saint canonised in the new St Peter's Basilica,<sup>526</sup> the other showing a topography of Montserrat with Collbatò clearly in sight.

Perhaps it was due to a personal affinity or for penitential purposes, Catalan knights, in particular, seem to have used the cult of Our Lady of Montserrat as their own personal absent presence: a way of carrying with them a piece of home wherever they went. To mention one other example, the Spanish Imperial general during the Thirty Years War, Fra Baltazar Marradas y Vich from Valencia, was a great promoter of Spanish devotions in Bohemia and Moravia. A votive painting showing him and his nephew kneeling next to the Virgin of Montserrat, (*Fig.17*) stylistically similar to the Gargallo painting, survives to this day in Vodňany (Czech Republic).<sup>527</sup> Marradas was also an active patron of the church of Emmaus in Prague, which was administered by members of the Benedictine community of the Monastery of Montserrat in Spain. In 1640, he commissioned a *retablo* for the main altar. Descriptions mention a statue of the Virgin of Montserrat<sup>528</sup> above the tabernacle, a painting of Emmaus and a *sopraquadro* with the resurrected Christ, flanked by statues of St Benedict and St Scholastica, the whole apparatus decorated with Imperial shields and eagles.<sup>529</sup> Marradas was a firm believer in the use of particular devotions as a means of creating a link, spiritual as much as political, between distant Spain and contested Bohemia. After the victory of the Catholic armies at the battle of the White Mountain (1620), Fra Marradas, who was one of the Imperial commanders in the battle, paid for the rededication of a Lutheran church in Malá

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<sup>525</sup> Canalda Llobet (2015), 78.

<sup>526</sup> St Ramon was a saint of Catalan origin, whose cult was strongest in Barcelona. Silvia Canalda Llobet explains that Francisco Peña, the main hagiographer of St Raymond of Peñafort was governor of Spanish confraternity in the church of Montserrat in Rome and a close friend of Gargallo; he was even succeeded by the same Gargallo as governor of the confraternity upon his death in 1612. This coincided with one of Gargallo's visits to Rome, which also happens to be the same period when the frescoes were made: Canalda Llobet (2020), 63-64.

<sup>527</sup> Městské muzeum a galerie, náměstí Svobody 18, Vodňany, Czech Republic

<sup>528</sup> The only part of the decorative program to have survived the bombardment, now held in the Jesuit church of St Ignatius in Nové Město, Prague.

<sup>529</sup> Štěpánek, Pavel, 'Montserrat a Praga, l'etapa espanyola al monestir d'Emaús a Praga (1635-1871)', *RACBASJ. Butlletí XX* (2006), 62.

Strana (Prague), which received the title of the church of Our Lady of Victories and St Anthony.<sup>530</sup> His coat of arms still adorns the façade of this church, now famous for the 1555 statue of the 'Infant Jesus of Prague.'

A similar complex to Montserrat with a different connection to the Order was the Monastery of Salceda, close to Guadalajara. Around 1566, in the area of the village of Peñalaver, people started recording many miracles. Soon after, a large medallion was discovered in the foundations of an old Franciscan monastery, showing two knights with crosses on their mantles, which were immediately taken to be knights of St John. The image was interpreted as showing the knights' encounter with the Virgin Mary in a willow in 1236.<sup>531</sup> The miracles were recorded by notaries and an official history of the place was published in 1616 by the Franciscan Don Pedro González de Mendoza, Archbishop of Granada.<sup>532</sup> Mendoza himself had been a member of the Order of St John '*a minore eta*' and then opted to join the Franciscans later in life.<sup>533</sup> He had a deep personal connection with this place, since he had lived there for some time and wrote that he had renovated it at his expense, modelling it after Montserrat and Guadalupe. A plan of the monastery as it was envisioned in the first decades of the seventeenth century, published for the first time in 1616 (*Fig.18*) shows much more than a basic renovation. It shows a *palazzo* set in an elaborate complex of gardens, smaller shrines and a main relics chapel, complete with a pilgrim infirmary.

Visitors were encouraged to approach the main chapel gradually, moving from one small chapel to the next amongst olive trees and orchards. Each shrine or stop along the way represented a particular episode or contained a specific sentence that the pilgrims could meditate on, with the help of appropriate images.<sup>534</sup> Indeed, the third part of Mendoza's book

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<sup>530</sup> On Marradas and Spanish art in the Czech Republic, see: Štěpánek, Pavel, *Trajectories of Spanish Art and Culture in Bohemia, Studies and essays about Spanish and Ibero-American Art* (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2021).

<sup>531</sup> Christian, William A., *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989), 66-67, 88, 102.

<sup>532</sup> González de Mendoza, Pedro, *Historia del Monte Celia de Nuestra Señora de Salceda...* (Madrid: Juan Muñoz, 1616).

<sup>533</sup> Marías, Fernando, 'El verdadero Sacro Monte, de Granada a La Salceda: Don Pedro González de Mendoza, Obispo de Sigüenza, y el Mone Celia', *Anuario del Dipartimento de History y Teoría del Arte* (U.A.M.), Vol. IV., (1992), 134; he was received in the Order in 1571 in the Priory of Castille, with the patronage of Gregory XIII who destined him for a career in the Church.

<sup>534</sup> Christian, 106.



Figure 16: Balthasar Marradas and Our Lady of Montserrat, Městské muzeum a galerie, Vodňany, Czech Republic.

was dedicated to the pilgrimage of the soul along Monte Celia, which served as both a description and as a guide to potential visitors, implying that one was expected to follow a set route.<sup>535</sup> In reality, the Sacred Mount offered two different set paths for meditation, the first focused on the infancy of Christ and some Franciscan saints, and the other focused on the Passion.

By 1610, the year Carlo Borromeo was canonised in Rome, Don Pedro González de Mendoza completed his project of the Holy Mount of Celia and the chapel of relics. Pope Paul V showered Bishop Mendoza with indulgences to attract pilgrims to visit his relics. To obtain the remission from sins, one had to first acknowledge those sins and repent from them, which is why the chapel of relics was structured as a reward at the end of the path from the '*Valle del Infierno*' to the '*Ermita de la Resurrección*'. The engraving of Monte Celia by Hieronymus Strasser<sup>536</sup> is exceptionally busy, but the eye is immediately drawn to the Virgin Mary at the centre of the aerial view of the sacred mount. She is emanating a glow and coming out of the branches of a willow tree, split cleanly in the middle. The Virgin is the focal point of the topography, just as she should be the focal point for souls along the pilgrimage on Monte Celia, as the author tells us.<sup>537</sup> The eye follows the tree to the second set of protagonists, two kneeling Knights of Malta proudly showing the insignia of their membership. The inscription also addresses the knights, '*whose arms held the shield with the white cross*', since they were worthy of the vision of Our Lady of Salceda.

The two knights represent the viewer, who too, if worthy, would soon see the image of the Virgin. All around the border are twelve panels with scenes representing twelve miracles, complete with a central panel with the royal coat of arms, connecting the spiritual to the temporal. The top half of the plate is dominated by the topography of the Sacred Mount, clearly defined by boundary walls that are reminiscent of the medieval artistic setting of an *hortus conclusus* (an enclosed garden typically associated with scenes of the Annunciation).

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<sup>535</sup> Marías, 140-141.

<sup>536</sup> Strasser from Austria was also a Franciscan: Marías, 140.

<sup>537</sup> Marías, 140.







The boundary walls recall the fortifications of a city, specifically those of Jerusalem, with thriving vegetation and orderly pathways, contrasted by the bare hills *extramuros*. Towering above the landscape, reminiscent of a castle keep, is the monastery and church where the image of the Virgin was, the final stop for the pilgrim after having ascended the Golgotha with Christ, descended with him in the belly of the earth, and risen anew. The story of Our Lady of the Willow (Salceda) was popular among Spanish knights, as attested by the lengthy description of the miracles given by Fra Juan Augustin de Funes and the claim that the first church was the property of the Order of St John before it was ceded to the Franciscans.<sup>538</sup> The second volume of Fra Funes' *Cronica* was dedicated to Grand Master Lascaris and contains many poems praising the author from several knights who were his friends, the first among them being Fra Lope de Vega.

There is no denying that Lope de Vega's *Romancero Espiritual*, the Sacro Monte di Varallo and the Holy Mount of Salceda follow the same spiritual programme and complement each other in terms of style and intent by inviting the visitor to repent through a set of clearly defined actions in specially designed spaces. Like Borromeo, both Lope de Vega and Pedro González de Mendoza had intimate ties with the Order of St John and were both fascinated by the idea of bringing the 'Jerusalem lost' to Spain; Vega through his literature and Mendoza by building a miniature version of it in Guadalajara. They, and others as we shall see, represent a lasting desire for Christians to experience Jerusalem and live out scenes from the gospels, without physically travelling there. This desire to build a New Jerusalem closer to home was very much at the heart of an Order that carried Jerusalem in its very name. Long before their arrival in Malta, the Order had built or administered churches of the Holy Sepulchre, to-scale reproductions of the Sepulchre in the Holy Land, in part out of nostalgia but also as a form of 'absent presence', hoping to generate the same grace by replicating this space elsewhere.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Funes, Juan Augustin, *Cronica de la ilustrissima milicia y sagrada religion de San Juan Bautista de Jerusalem..*, Vol. II (Zaragoza: Pedro Verges, 1639), 346.

<sup>539</sup> Examples include the Chiesa del Sepolcro in Pisa, San Pietro in Consavia (Asti), and Vera Cruz de Segovia.

## ***Peregrinatio***

*'Sacred space remained a mirror of the people who built and used it and defined and fought over it.'*<sup>540</sup>

Whilst *metanoia* consists of the spiritual journey from dark to light, which could be achieved through a carefully planned sacred space, there were other holy places that were charged with such power, whereby the very act of visiting them was considered an act of repentance. In places like the Holy Land, where Christ's earthly presence had left its physical mark, the faithful believed they could partake in the very sanctity of God. Although the human experience of God is very difficult to write about due to its subjective nature, the clerical need to supervise and mould these places, lest they become the object of superstition, provides us with more tangible material that can be studied. Sermons, pamphlets, decrees, and correspondence allow the historian to follow early modern people into these spaces.<sup>541</sup>

The Order of St John is itself a product of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It would have never existed had it not been for the medieval fascination with pilgrimage sites and the need this fascination generated for hospitality and security along the way. Jerusalem remained ingrained in the Order's ethos long after the institution was physically removed from the Holy Land. After losing the holy sites in Jerusalem, the knights refashioned themselves as pilgrims in the world, adopting a wider understanding of their mission that focused on a more imaginary concept of Jerusalem, since the physical one was unattainable. Meanwhile, the Order focused on other pilgrimage sites over which it could have greater control, including one very important pilgrimage destination within Malta: the Grotto of St Paul.

Despite a general decline in pilgrimages across Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century, the second half of the century and the first decades of the seventeenth saw an exponential growth in the popularity of pilgrimages across all Mediterranean regions. As for northern Europe, the continued religious struggles resulted in pilgrimage sites becoming increasingly contested spaces. In Christian piety, pilgrimages were not always widely accepted. Early

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<sup>540</sup> De Silva, 20.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



theologians struggled to reconcile the universality of Christ's grace, a core feature in Pauline doctrine, with the concentration of that grace in one focal point, which is essentially what pilgrimage shrines are.<sup>542</sup> Before Luther and the Reformation, this objection largely remained one of theological principle. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ushered in new theological traditions such as *Devotio Moderna*, which gradually attempted to shift the focus to the Eucharist and internal Christian life, as opposed to physically setting out on a journey. Opposition towards pilgrimages became more vocal, with some like Erasmus equating it to superstition.<sup>543</sup>

Protestant Reformers openly opposed pilgrimage for the same reason, arguing that the channel to God should be the Holy Scripture, not a physical place. In one of his sermons in 1528, Luther criticised the pilgrims who visited the tomb of St James in Compostela, saying that God was nearer to them at home than he was in Santiago.<sup>544</sup> Calvinists and reformed protestants went even further, responding to the Catholic veneration of saints and shrines with iconoclasm. In the 1560s, reformed protestants raided and damaged many major shrines in France and the Low Countries, including the important Sanctuaries of Notre Dame de Rocamadour, Notre Dame de Liesse, and the Cathedral of St Martin of Tours.<sup>545</sup> Despite some criticism, the Catholic Church remained enthusiastic about the veneration of saints in shrines, as long as they remained circumspect and supervised. To give a Maltese example, the cult of St Paul at the Rabat Grotto was reborn thanks to the efforts of Grand Master Wignacourt, who nevertheless sought to place a presence of Hospitaller chaplains in an adjacent *Collegium* he built, to ensure that the shrine had a steady presence of ministers to regulate the cult and administer sacraments.<sup>546</sup>

It was immediately clear to Catholic reformers that sacred spaces were a central feature in the creation of religious identities, particularly in areas that had been devastated by religious

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<sup>542</sup> Tingle, Elizabeth, *Sacred Journeys in the Counter-Reformation; Long distance pilgrimage in North-West Europe* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 4.

<sup>543</sup> Erasmus, Desiderius, *The Colloquies*, 2:1, 36.

<sup>544</sup> Tingle (2020), 5.

<sup>545</sup> Tingle (2020), 5; Reinburg, Virginia, *Storied Places* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2019), 107-154.

<sup>546</sup> Dal Pozzo I, 458 (1609); Zammit, William, 'Grand Master Aloph de Wignacourt's foundation for St Paul's Grotto, 1619,' in John Azzopardi (ed), *The cult of St Paul in the Christian churches and in the Maltese tradition* (Malta: Wignacourt Collegiate Museum, 2006), 219-235

strife. Damaged shrines were revived or rebuilt as a means of reinstating Catholicism in the community, by repossessing those places considered holy.<sup>547</sup> Even so, this was not simply the case of reviving old medieval practices. The clergy sought to shift the focus on parochial religious life while controlling devotional practices more closely.<sup>548</sup> Philip Soergel argued that a pilgrimage:

‘was no longer a practice requiring the faithful to divorce themselves utterly from urban or village surroundings...but to allow the faithful the opportunity to begin to conquer mind and body, enumerate and expunge sins and to wean life from earthly desires to the embracing of eternal ones.’<sup>549</sup>

This is clearly illustrated by the Oratorian practices of the visit of the seven churches that gradually enveloped Rome within the sacred landscape that mostly featured catacombs and shrines *extra muros*. The city became a sacred landscape, and the pilgrimage a means of purifying the streets rather than simply distancing oneself from them. There were growing concerns that long pilgrimages entailed overnight stays, which in turn could provoke sinful behaviour, not to mention the dangers that travel presented for the pilgrim on foot. Well before the Reformation, however, there had been plans to license the main pilgrimage sites. This would entail extending the privileges offered to pilgrims visiting a particular site to other affiliate regional churches. The greatest of these privileges was the redemption from sin, otherwise known as ‘indulgence’.

Indulgences have come to be understood as the final affront that led to the Protestant schism. However, indulgences came in many forms.<sup>550</sup> Elizabeth Tingle has also shown that Luther was not alone in criticizing indulgences. Others in the Catholic Church were also sceptical of their validity.<sup>551</sup> The result of this was that during the sixteenth century, the efficacy of indulgences in redirecting devotion was just as varied as their deployment. The reform of the

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<sup>547</sup> Tingle, *Sacred Journeys*, 6.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>549</sup> Soergel, Philip, *Wondrous in His Saints, Counter Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 167.

<sup>550</sup> For a thorough study on Indulgences, see: Tingle, Elizabeth, *Indulgences after Luther: pardons in counter-reformation France, 1520-1720* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015).

<sup>551</sup> Tingle (2015), 21-22.

conditions of this pardon was entrusted to the Council of Trent, however the decrees of the Council on indulgences were hurried and inconclusive.<sup>552</sup> The Order of St John was one of the few institutions that continued to benefit from papal indulgences, even while the higher echelons of the Church were debating their proper use. In 1563, whilst the closing session of the Council failed to issue a decree on Indulgences lest the final sessions dragged on beyond the end of the year, the Order's ambassador in Rome, Fra Cambiano and the Bailiff of Aquila Fra Felizes, convinced Pope Pius IV to issue an indulgence to all those who would help in the building of a new city on *Monte S. Elmo* (present-day Valletta).<sup>553</sup> Several months and a brutal siege had to pass before the first stone of the city was to be laid, but the power of this concession remained.

Not only were indulgences a reward for good works, but more so a means of widening the concept of pilgrimage. In the manuscript treatise *Trattato della Maggior Chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni* (1698) by the chaplain Fra Giovanni Domenico Manso, indulgences are given great prominence, occupying the first chapter and part of the second.<sup>554</sup> Manso's work was inspired by a need for the Order to keep track of the many privileges it enjoyed, being a multi-centennial institution. As we shall see with the case of the Grotto of St Paul, this process became gradually more meticulous towards the eighteenth century and expanded to include the spiritual endowments of the Order, as well.

One such spiritual endowment or pious foundation particularly echoes Borromeo's disdain for Carnival. Manso's treatise documented how Prior Stefano Lomellini (1635-1699) had left an endowment so that on the last Sunday before Lent (Quinquagesima) and the subsequent weekdays (*2a e 3a feria*), which in non-liturgical terms coincides with carnival, the Holy Sacrament had to be placed in the Oratory for a general veneration. Sermons on a specific topic were to be said in the morning and as many masses as possible were to be celebrated on each altar in suffrage for the souls of the departed members of the Order.<sup>555</sup> Lomellini's intention was clearly to disengage knights and the populace in general from sinful carnival

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<sup>552</sup> Tingle (2015), 24-26.

<sup>553</sup> Bosio III, 459.

<sup>554</sup> N.L.M. Ms. 235.

<sup>555</sup> MS 235, f.29

festivities. To attract them to the Oratory, he obtained a plenary indulgence that would be awarded to all those who visited that specific place and recited the orations that the *brevetto* demanded during those three days.<sup>556</sup> Following Lomellini's example, the Jesuits founded a similar practice in their own church in Valletta during carnival.<sup>557</sup> Furthermore, Grand Master Perellos built on the Lomellini indulgence by obtaining another in 1698 that covered all those who attended a suffrage mass specifically on the Oratory's altar.<sup>558</sup> Manso's work further proves that the importance of indulgences did not wane, rather they became clearer over the long counter-reformation period and hence the need developed for them to be properly documented. The fact that they were used to reward pilgrims visiting Rome on Jubilee years, but also soldiers who fought at Lepanto (1571) or those who helped build Valletta (after 1566), and equally those who attended the translation ceremonies and feasts, highlights the spectrum of what was considered sacred.

### ***Passio Domini***

If we had to choose a year that was more symbolic than any other for the case studies that this chapter is presenting, it would have to be 1610. It was the year that the entire Catholic world was energised by the canonisation of Carlo Borromeo, whose promotion of the Sacro Monti inspired Pedro de Mendoza to build his Spanish version of Varallo in Salceda. It was also the year when Giacomo Bosio, the Order's official historian and agent in Rome since Verdalle's time, published *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce*.<sup>559</sup> It is hard to ascertain from the text what effect the anticipation of the Borromeo canonisation had on Bosio since S. Carlo is not mentioned once in the entire piece, despite references to the church of Santa Prassede, Borromeo's titular church in Rome, and the Holy Nail of Milan which was paraded by the Cardinal for the relief from contagion during the plague of 1576. On the other hand, Bosio's *Trionfante Croce* is representative of a growing fascination with religious materiality that

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<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> AAV, S.S. *Malta* Vol. 21, f.46 (1666); Vol: 24, f.41 (1668); Vol. 26, f.142 (1671).

<sup>558</sup> MS 235, 30.

<sup>559</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce* (Rome: Alfonso Ciacone, 1610).

related to Christ's Passion, with the Hospitaller historian closely emulating works such as Cipriano Uberti's *Opera della croce* (1585)<sup>560</sup> and Justus Lipsius' *De Cruce* (1593).<sup>561</sup>

Bosio's *Trionfante Croce* represents a different category of works from Lope de Vega's prayerbook and Giaime Zummo's 'pastoral' letters. Although it could still be useful as a piece of literature that accompanied pilgrims, helping them to meditate and visualise, the focus is on objects rather than spaces, more specifically the veritable power they held within them and not solely their perceived power. If Lope's method moved the heart by means of pathos and Zummo's by his repeated invocation of fire, Bosio appealed more to the intellect as he sought to ground his *compositio loci* firmly in historical, naturalistic, and geographical facts. To explain how glorious the Cross was as a symbol of Christ's passion, he chose to elaborate on what it meant for the ancients, thus offering a form of anthropological assessment of what the cross meant in various contexts.

The dedicatory note to the *Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce* further suggests that Bosio wanted to show off his erudition to impress his patron, the influential Cardinal Gregorio Petrocchini di Montelparo, to whom he dedicated the work. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters, the Order's historian did not work in isolation from the socio-political milieu of the Catholic Church but rather depended on the favours of the Papacy, an influential Cardinal or a wealthy patron.<sup>562</sup> The frontispiece shows the coat of arms of Petrocchino with the elephant surmounted by a tower and two putti holding the cardinal's hat. An image of the Virgin Mary is flanked by Pope St Gregory and St Augustine, one recalling the namesake of the cardinal and the other the religious Order of which he was a member. Petrocchino was a patron of Bosio since his early days in Rome, and quite possibly sustained him financially.<sup>563</sup> Even though this work was not commissioned by the Order specifically, Bosio's work had a

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<sup>560</sup> Uberti, Cipriano, *Opera della croce, distinta in cinque libri...*(Vercelli: Giovanni Francesco Pellipari, 1585).

<sup>561</sup> Lipsius, Justus, *De cruce libri tres ad sacram profanamque historiam utiles* (Anwerp: Plantin and Moretus, 1593).

<sup>562</sup> Cardinal Montelparo was a close collaborator with the Spanish crown and frequently sent Roman relics as gifts to those in the Spanish court.

<sup>563</sup> Ronzani, Rocco, 'Dell'Impresa dell'elefante. L'arme del cardinale Petrocchini nell'erudizione dei secoli XVI-XVII' in *Il Cardinale Montelparo*. Atti del Convegno (Montelparo: 17 giugno 2012), ed. Archivio Diocesano San Benedetto del Tronto, Teramo 2013 (quaderni per la ricerca, 17/2013), 4.

particular appeal to the Knights of Malta. The Statutes and Ordinances of the Order<sup>564</sup> give a detailed description of the ceremony of investiture of a new member, which among other items of clothing, featured a *cordone* or *stolone* (Fig.19); such an image is also clearly visible on multiple plates of the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem*.



Figure 18: left: Knights wearing the Stolone from the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* (1588), Thomassin, Cesari. Courtesy: National Library of Malta; right: an eighteenth-century Stolone, Courtesy: Wignacourt Museum, Rabat -Malta.

This item of clothing consisted of a long-braided rope that was attached to the shoulder and carried over the arm, worn with the church robes or *manto da punta*. One encounters slightly

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<sup>564</sup> *Ordinazioni del Capitolo Generale Celebrato nell'anno MDCXXXI dal fu Em.o Rev.o Gran Maestro Fra Antonio di Paola* (Borgo Nuovo: Camere, 1674).

different forms of *cordoni* in visual sources between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries; however, what is consistent is the representation of a number of symbols recalling the Passion objects. According to the 1639 Ordinances, the symbols that were shown and explained one by one to the new knight were: ‘the cord with which he was bound, the whip with which he was whipped, the column where he was tied and heavily beaten; and these were the dices, the sponge and finally the cross upon which Our Christ Jesus suffered for us, which has to be your guide and your teacher in all your ventures, for the entirety of your life.’<sup>565</sup>

A further connection with Hospitallers in the *Trionfante Croce* is the representation on some of the pages of knights in armour, kneeling in adoration in front of the eucharist, sword in hand, whilst pointing outwards at vanquished Ottomans. There is a clear eschatological link between Catholic sacramental practices and the crucifixion itself, as the *Passio Domini* starts with the establishment of the Eucharist. This message is further emphasised through the Pauline quotation that Bosio used to describe what the aim of his book was ‘*We preach Christ Crucified, stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles*’ (1Cor:23).<sup>566</sup> The transgressive nature of the Cross as both an object and as a symbol of salvation is made evident by the author to the reader before the text proper starts. According to Bosio, the Christian could use his work to meditate on the greatest mystery of all, that of God choosing the cross as an instrument of redemption, an object of torture that for centuries had represented only shame and suffering.

Even if, in some cases, Bosio was sceptical of the authenticity of these objects and stressed that one should use them as props to visualise the passion of Christ, he never doubted the power of intercession that these objects could still possess if used right. His rhetorical leap from the object that invokes a memory to an object that alters behaviour was achieved through concrete examples from his own time. When writing about the *titulus*, the wooden

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<sup>565</sup> *Ordinationi del Capitolo Generale Celebrato nell'anno MDCXXXI dal fu Em.o Rev.o Gran Maestro Fra Antonio di Paola* (Borgo Nuovo: Camere, 1674), 9: ‘questa è la Corda, con la quale fù legato; questi furono i flagelli, con i quali fù battuto, questa è la Colonna, dove fù legato, e flagellato aspramente; questi furono i dadi, e questa la sponga, e finalmenta questa è la Croce, sopra la quale patì Nostro Signore Giesù Cristo per noi, la quale hà da esser vostra guida, e vostra insegna in tutte l'imprese vostre, e per tutto il tempo di vita vostra.’

<sup>566</sup> Bosio (1610), prologue.

plaque that was nailed to Christ's cross containing the accusation that led to his execution, Bosio remarked that the same exact practice was used when other saints received their martyrdom. As an example, he gave details on the martyrdom of six Franciscans and twenty Japanese in Nagasaki that took place on 5 February 1597.<sup>567</sup> Bosio had access to a *Relatione* on the event that was published in Rome in 1599,<sup>568</sup> directly quoting the part where the martyrs-to-be were taken to the site of their execution on carts surmounted by their accusation in the form of a *titulus* so that everyone could see and read. The scene was presented as a spiritual battle, so much so that the *Relatione* described the Franciscans as 'knights of the cross' fighting the devil. The juxtaposing of Christ's 'Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum' plaque and those of others who followed his example and were faced with the same treatment, was used by Bosio to blur the contexts of time and space, linking first-century Jerusalem to sixteenth-century Japan.

Nevertheless, the plaque was very much a tangible object that Bosio saw with his own eyes in Rome. According to tradition, it had been brought by St Helen from the Holy Land, where part of it was physically embedded in the main arch supporting the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. For many years it had been forgotten until, as Bosio narrates, it had been miraculously rediscovered in 1496. In celebration of this discovery, Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503) issued a plenary indulgence to all those who visited Santa Croce on the last Sunday of January. Bosio was aware that many Protestants had argued against the authenticity of this item, and he knew that others existed in Toulouse and elsewhere, but he believed that these might have been parts of the same whole.<sup>569</sup> Always the scholar, Bosio expounded upon the minutest of details; the original colour of the *titulus*, the colour used to inscribe the text, whether it was nailed on top of the cross or at the bottom, and so on. For every dilemma, he

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<sup>567</sup> Bosio does not specify that three of the twenty Japanese were Jesuits. This is, in part, reflective of the fact that the Jesuits were initially reluctant to recognise the martyrdoms, although the Jesuit Bartolomeo Ricci had included them in his 1608 *Triumphus Jesu Christi Crucifixi*. For a discussion on the imagery of the cross and the martyrs of Nagasaki, see: Rappo, Hitomi Omata, 'Death on the Cross; the Beatification of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Nagasaki (1627)' in *A la Luz de Roma*, Garcia et al. (eds.), Vol.III, (Roma: Roma-Tre Press, 2020), 129-150.

<sup>568</sup> Bosio (1610), 60; There were other accounts of the event published in Rome that same year, such as Frois Luigi, *Relatione della Gloriosa Morte di XXVI posti in croce per commandamento del Re di Giappone, alli 5 di Febraio 1597...*(Roma: Luigi Zannetti, 1599), which was sent to the Jesuit General Acquaviva as a report on the matter and translated into Italian by the Jesuit Gasparo Spitilli di Campli.

<sup>569</sup> Bosio (1610), 65.



proposed a rich bibliography, both historical and theological, that showcased his connections in Rome with the best scholars and access to the most important libraries, not to mention the vastness of his own knowledge. He quoted effortlessly from the Venerable Bede, St John Chrysostom, Tertullian, St Ambrose, and countless others.

Another object that Bosio wrote about was the column that Christ was tied to. Here again, there is a long debate on the kind of whip that was used to hit Christ: a *fustario*, a *virgae*, or a *flagellatio*.<sup>570</sup> It might seem a trivial detail to modern readers, even practising Christians, but for Bosio and his contemporaries, it was a necessary exercise to permit a visual reconstruction of gospels as faithfully as possible, not to mention to validate what objects had indeed been identified. The flagellation column was one such item. Traditionally it was believed to be one of the objects that St Helen discovered on Mount Sion. Bosio relayed the pilgrim practice of making textile belts and tying them around the column before they were worn by the sick, the belief being that the grace passed through the column to the belt. The column is located in the church of S. Praxedes, having been brought there by Cardinal Giovanni Colonna on his way back from the Holy Land in 1223. Colonna had been sent there to assist the Christian armies fighting in the Crusades. Owing to his surname being 'column', there was no item more apt for him to take home to Rome the most important column of all.<sup>571</sup> Bosio explained the value that society gave to such objects with a wordplay, '*essendo egli stato flagellato....il flagello non s'approssimara alla casa tua*'.<sup>572</sup>

Closer to home for Bosio, in the Hospitaller sense, was the relic of the thorn from the crown placed on Christ's head by the mocking soldiers. Bosio again discusses the species of thorn the crown was hewn from; whether it was a marine rush or otherwise, with references to Cesare Baronio's writings.<sup>573</sup> Bosio's intention was to prove the miracle of the flowering of the thorns, since marine rushes do not flower, and yet some of the relics from the crown of thorns miraculously did.

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<sup>570</sup> Bosio (1610), 78.

<sup>571</sup> Bosio (1610), 77-78.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. *Flagello* is used here to mean both 'to chastise' as well as 'calamity', which explains why they were brought out whenever the city was hit by a calamity.

<sup>573</sup> Bosio (1610), 81.

*'...amongst other sacred objects and holy relics that [the Order] had brought with it from Jerusalem; is a thorn from the sacred crown of Christ; that yearly, on Good Friday, used to flourish. And so it did every year, blossom flowers, though since some years, it has stopped making flowers. Perhaps this is due to the great sins of men in this too malicious and debauched century. It used to, the holy spine, show itself covered in flowers, all open around the sixth hour on Good Friday, the time when our Redeemer took his last breath. However, in 1457, during the time of Grand Master Jacques de Milly, whilst he was on the altar of the Magistral chapel in Rhodes, it made flowers for three hours in the presence of the Grand Master and the Lords of Council, many knights and the populace who flocked to see it. For the eternal testimony and faith in that miracle, the Grand Master ordered that an authenticated Bull would be sent [to Rome], which until this day can be found registered in the Chancery of the Religion in Malta, Register of Bulls of the years 1457, folio 182...*

*It was also decreed by the same Grand Master, that out of devotion and for the honour of the most holy crown of thorns; every year on the eleventh August, they should celebrate the feast and solemnity in the Conventual church of the religion with the semi-double mass.'*<sup>574</sup>

The Order's presence in narratives surrounding Passion relics was also documented in the case of the *inventio* of the Holy Lance, the spear that was believed to have pierced Christ's side. According to tradition, this was also discovered by St Helen in the Holy Land and kept in a cruciform reliquary in the church of the Holy Sepulchre. After many years, it miraculously appeared in Antioch in 1098, while the city was being besieged by Corbagat of Persia. The city was defended by Godfrey de Bullion, whose numbers were dwindling. Meanwhile, a Provençal priest had a vision of St Andrew, who repeatedly told him to go look for the relic in the church of St Peter in the city; and the lance was soon discovered. The Christians took it as a divine sign that they would prevail over the enemy, and so they did. The episode is reported in almost all chronicles of the Crusades, chief among them William of Tyre.<sup>575</sup> The lance passed on to the Emperor of Constantinople, who cut the tip off and donated it to the French king, as the Order's fifteenth-century chronicler Guillaume Caoursin narrated.<sup>576</sup> The rest was kept in the church of San Giovanni in Pietra (St John in Studion) in Constantinople until the

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<sup>574</sup> Bosio (1610), 85. Also reproduced in Part II, Book 7 of the *Dell'Istoria della Religione*.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*

fall of the city in 1453. The lance, along with the right hand of St John, the reed and the sponge from the passion were thus captured by the Ottomans. The hand of St John was gifted to the Order sometime later as part of the deal involving the heir to the sultanate Jem (Zizmi).

In the wider discussion of notions on 'particular' and 'universal' devotions, the cult of the Holy Lance of Longinus represents a significant case study of the role of diplomacy and the religious Orders in the acquisition of meaningful relics, as well as the process that leads to the creation of cults for universal veneration. It was, in fact, thanks to the intervention of Grand Master d'Aubusson that the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid gifted the lance to Pope Innocent VIII. The relic was subsequently escorted to Rome in 1492 by the Prior of Auvergne, and nephew of the Grand Master, Fra Guy de Blanchefort. Bosio gave the exact date of the translation of the relic (30 May 1492) and some details of the ceremony, which included the Pope carrying the relic himself from Porta del Popolo.<sup>577</sup> Innocent VIII wanted to keep the relic in his bedchamber until he had built an appropriate ciborium in St Peter's specifically for the lance. However, he fell ill and died in July of that year.<sup>578</sup> More detail was given by Francesco Maria Torrigio in the second edition of *Le Sacre Grotte Vaticane* (1639),<sup>579</sup> reprinted specifically to include descriptions of the newly made frescoes sponsored by the Barberini family.<sup>580</sup> (Fig.20) Torrigio mentioned how Pope Paul V translated the Holy Lance from the old Basilica to the new one, and placed it in the same ciborium where the Holy Veil was kept.<sup>581</sup> The final collocation and a new altar to St Longinus were completed by Pope Urban VIII Barberini and his cardinal brother and nephew,<sup>582</sup> complete with a set of frescoes by Giovanni Battista Ricci

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<sup>577</sup> Bosio (1610), 122.

<sup>578</sup> The mausoleum of Innocent VIII still shows him blessing the people with his right arm while holding the lance head in his left.

<sup>579</sup> Torrigio, Francesco Maria, *Le Sacre Grotte Vaticane nelle quali si tratta di corpi santi, sepolchri...*(Roma: Vitale Mascardi, 1639). Torrigio confirmed the Order's involvement, mentioned Grand Master d'Aubusson, and gave more information on the arrival of the Ottoman ambassador in Rome, the Translation of the relic to St Peter, and the construction of an appropriate space to host the relic.

<sup>580</sup> Sivan, Pierluigi, 'I cicli pittorici delle Grotte Vaticane, Alcuni aspetti poco noti dell'opera di Giovan Battista Ricci da Novara e di Carlo Pellegrini', *Arte Lombarda*, 90-91 (3-4) (1989), 104-121

<sup>581</sup> Torrigio, 210.

<sup>582</sup> Francesco who was the Cardinal secretary of state and Antonio who was a knight of Malta.



Figure 19: Translation of the Holy Lance of Longinus, Carlo Pellegrini (ca.1630) [detail], Grotte Vaticane

and a new reliquary for the lance.<sup>583</sup> This relic, along with the Holy Veil of Veronica and a piece of the True Cross were the highlight of the Good Friday ceremonies when they were exhibited for public veneration. The context to the interminable debate discussed by Bosio in his 1610 opus, and other similar works, is, therefore, best understood when one considers that St Longinus is a secondary character in the Passion narrative. He was not even mentioned by name in the gospels but thanks to the recovery of that one object that was thought to have been lost forever, he became, quite literally, one of the pillars upon whom St Peter's Basilica rests.<sup>584</sup>

The historian might be tempted to embark on a lengthy debate on exact provenance, compare bulls of authenticity and descriptions, build timelines and any other number of

<sup>583</sup> Torrigio, 220; "His Eminence Cardinal Barberini, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1634 gifted to the Vatican Basilica a new reliquary made of mountain crystal with gold ornaments, since that of Innocent VIII was broken..."

<sup>584</sup> Four statues and four corresponding altars hold St Peter's cupola, all four representing one of the four most important relics conserved by the basilica along with the bones of St Peter: St Helen holding the True Cross; St Andrew; St Veronica with the Veil; and St Longinus.



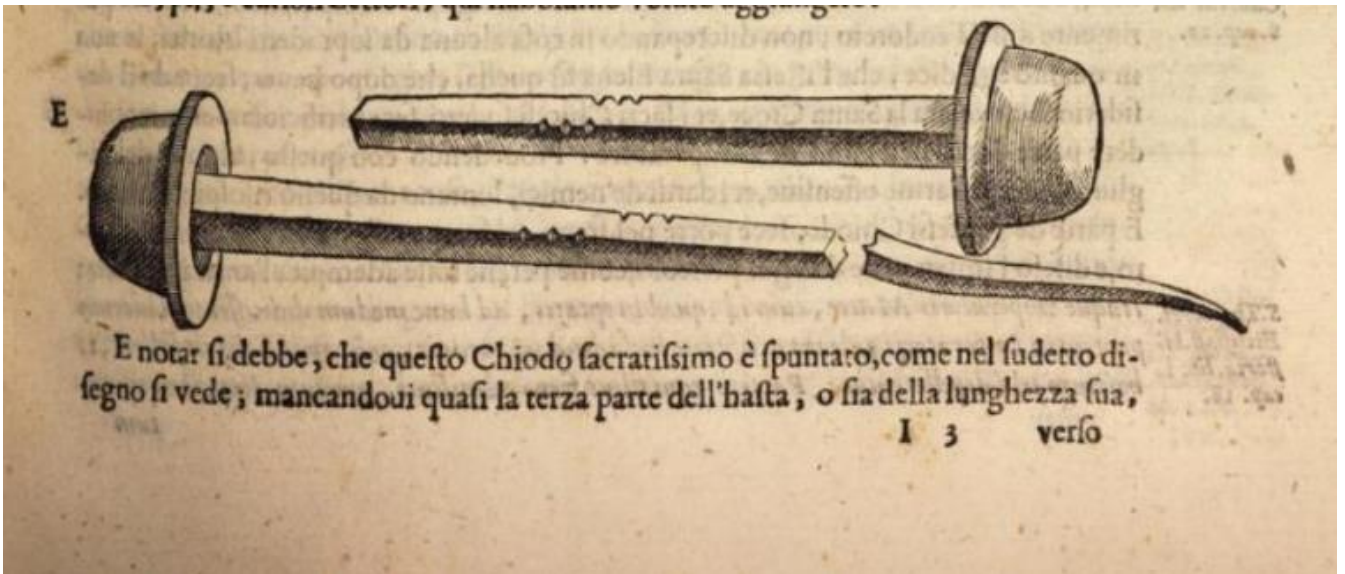
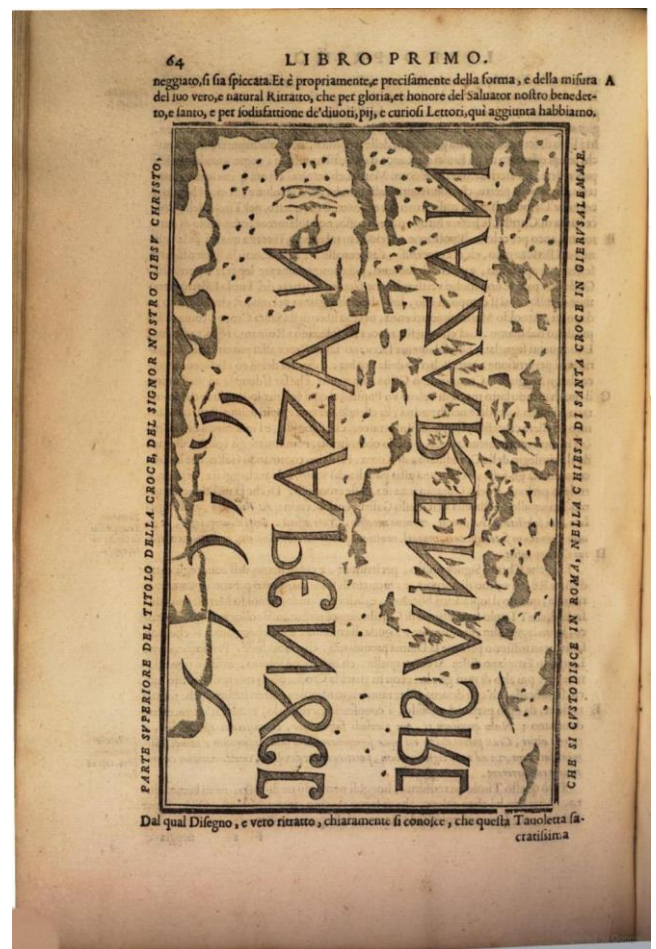


Figure 20: Illustrations from Bosio's *Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce* (1610), showing the Holy Nails (above), the Lance of Longinus (below left) and the Titulus (below right)



scientific assessments which would certainly expose serious plot holes in the narratives of the majority of these relics. Nevertheless, the goal of a true historical study of such objects, in connection to the spaces they inhabited and the rituals they evoked, should not be concerned with convincing the reader about their authenticity or otherwise. Such a dialectic could risk presenting individuals who were on other occasions shown to be erudite scholars, as being gullible and naïve. In the case of the Judas coins, a few pieces from the thirty that Judas received in exchange for betraying Christ, Bosio himself did not believe they were authentic. Still, they were utilised annually as powerful sacramentals, items of curiosity or props for meditation. The Order possessed three such coins, two in Malta and one in the Parisian church of St Jean Letran.<sup>585</sup> The Maltese pieces had been brought from Rhodes,<sup>586</sup> and following the construction of St John's church in Valletta, the Prior Fra Antonio Cressino invited Grand Master Cassiere to reinstate the practice of making wax copies to be distributed as part of the Good Friday ceremonies. These wax copies were held as miraculous, and many claimed that they were saved from tempests when they took them with them to sea.<sup>587</sup> Fra Francesco Buonarroti sent a few of these wax copies to his brother Michelangelo in Florence, certainly as items of curiosity, possibly also to be used for meditation.<sup>588</sup>

This is also why Bosio did not stop with the description and debate on the uses of the Judas coins, but concluded the section with a meditation, akin to a prayer, on the field that was bought with those pieces of silver, nicknamed after the episode 'the field of blood'. In the *Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce*, Bosio summarised a discussion that had been ongoing for centuries, one that sought to determine what currency was used to pay the price of redemption, since that is essentially the value that the thirty pieces of silver have in the Passion narrative. He roped in the Old Testament by creating a parallel with the murder of Abel, buried by his brother and murderer Cain to hide the crime: "the voice of the blood of your brother is calling out from the earth", quoted Bosio from Genesis, inviting the reader to

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<sup>585</sup> For a study on the thirty pieces of silver as medieval and early modern relics, see: Travaini, Lucia, *I Trenta Denari di Giuda: Storia di reliquie impreviste nell'Europa medievale e moderna* (Viella: Roma, 2020).

<sup>586</sup> Zoitu, Sofia, *Staging Holiness: The Case of Hospitaller Rhodes (ca.1309-1522)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 77.

<sup>587</sup> Bosio (1610), 68.

<sup>588</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 107, f.354; 6 June 1621.

think of self-sacrifice and the price of their own blood, which they were called to spill in the name of faith.<sup>589</sup>

### ***Moving Madonnas***

*“Vuestra hermita la planta porquien pueda, ser Loreto de España la Salzeda”*<sup>590</sup>

In all forms of Catholic spiritualities, be it Hospitaller, Borromean, Jesuit or otherwise, the presence of the Virgin Mary is ubiquitous. In Manresa, it was the Virgin Mary who inspired Ignatius to write his *Exercitia*. In his *Idea Atlantis Mariani* (1655),<sup>591</sup> the German Jesuit Wilhelm Gumpfenberg wrote that ‘the idea is to show how much the world owes to Mary and how much it may expect from her.’<sup>592</sup> In Gumpfenberg’s work, object or image are intertwined with place, with the image standing in for the Virgin herself, and the place representative of the Christian community’s expectations from that image. Ralph Dekoninck described the *Atlas Marianus* as an exercise in the universalisation of the particular and the particularisation of the universal, since Gumpfenberg emphasises the locale of the cult, yet at the same time the scores of Marian representations were all recalling the same figure.<sup>593</sup> Special attention was given to the image of Our Lady of Loreto, placed purposely on the frontispiece of the 1672 edition. The imagery of Mary sitting on the roof of her house between heaven and earth ‘*Mediatrix Caeli et terrae*’ is relatively traditional, with the Holy House presented as both a physical structure and a space, the analogy being that Mary herself was the ‘house’ that carried Christ. In so doing, the Virgin of Loreto as Christ’s vessel was presented as a matrix for all other representations of the Virgin, not necessarily stylistically but as an exercise of the imagination.

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<sup>589</sup> Bosio (1610), 68.

<sup>590</sup> González de Mendoza, Pedro, *Historia del Monte Celia de Nuestra Señora de Salceda...* (Madrid: Juan Muñoz, 1616).

<sup>591</sup> Gumpfenberg, Wilhelm, *Idea Atlantis Mariani* (Trento: Carlo Zanetti, 1655).

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; ‘...ostendere quantum Mariae mundus debeat, et quantum ab ea expectare possit.’

<sup>593</sup> Dekoninck, Ralph, ‘Propagatio Imaginum: The Translated Images of Our Lady of Foy’, *The Nomadic Object, The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, Göttler, Mochizuki (eds.) (Leiden and Boston, Brill: 2018), 241.

Similarly, in the Palace of the Grand Master in Valletta, the artist Matteo Perez d'Aleccio also chose to represent the Virgin as mediatrix in a scene, part of a cycle, that shows the Ottoman armada landing in Malta in 1565. In his fresco, d'Aleccio shows the Virgin on her knees, begging her son to intercede on behalf of the Order and Malta. The earliest representations of the Virgin of Loreto in Malta are invariably linked to the Order, suggesting that the cult of the Flying House was introduced to the islands by the Hospitallers. The earliest extant example from Bir Miftuħ (Gudja) parish predates the Council of Trent. It was commissioned by Fra Umberto Morines, Prior of Auvergne, as a votive painting in 1548.<sup>594</sup> The panel features the Virgin with child sitting on the Holy House, and St John the Baptist presenting to her the kneeling knight in a sort of *santa conversazione*. Another example roughly half a century later is perhaps a votive painting, though on this occasion, the Virgin is also present. In Figure 22, the iconography is reminiscent of the statue in Loreto and St John the Baptist; one can also find the founder of the Order of St John, Brother Gerard. The unidentified knight who commissioned this work from Bartolomeo Garagona is portrayed in the bottom right corner, looking at the Virgin suspended in mid-air.

Copies of miraculous images and objects could be considered equally efficacious by virtue of their imitation of the prototype. This is what Roberto Bellarmino had to say on the veneration of objects as images: *'In the same image there is embedded something sacred; without a doubt the resemblance with the sacred thing, the same dedication, or its consecration to the divine cult; therefore, these [objects] are worthy of honour in themselves, and not only because they are replacing the originals.'*<sup>595</sup> It was believed that Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints had the power of sacred ubiquity, the ability to be present throughout their various material representations.<sup>596</sup> Understanding how this displacement of miraculous energy worked is rather complex, and perhaps the simplest explanation is given by Gumpfenberg himself who described a sort of magnetic energy that travels along an iron chain: 'it is certain that the miraculous force that resides in the image of Mary comes from Mary herself and true

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<sup>594</sup> Degiorgio, Stephen, 'Hubert de Morines and the "Loreto" Church at Gudja, Malta', *Scientia et Religio, Studies in memory of Fr George Aquilina OFM (1932-2012)*, Scholar, Archivist and Franciscan Friar, J. Azzopardi (ed.) (Malta: Wignacourt Museum, 2014), 157-176.

<sup>595</sup> Bellarmino, Roberto, *Le Reliquie e le Immagini dei Santi*, traduzione di Leonardo Giordano a cura di Antonio Iannello (Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2018), 126.

<sup>596</sup> Dekoninck, 242.





Figure 21: *Our Lady of Loreto with St John the Baptist, Brother Gerard and Knight of Malta*, Bartolomeo Garagona [attr.], early seventeenth century. Church of Our Lady of Pieta, Pieta - Malta

believers know through long experience that this power also extends to images that have had contact with the original image.<sup>597</sup> Gumpfenberg was possibly inspired by the *virtus magnetica* of another Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher, who claimed that a force can attract all similar bodies.<sup>598</sup> An affront to the image, therefore, could undoubtedly be considered an attack on the Virgin herself.

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<sup>597</sup> Dekoninck, 244.

<sup>598</sup> On Kircher, see: Findlen, Paula (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher, the last man who knew everything* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); on Baroque inspiration see: De Lucca, Denis, *The Baroque Mind* (Malta: International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2018).

In the third part of his *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione*,<sup>599</sup> Giacomo Bosio recounted an episode involving a Greek conventual chaplain, Fra Stamati Condo, who stole a precious jewel that decorated the riza of the devotional icon of Our Lady of Philermos. (Fig.23) As a demonstration of the fact that the theft was not merely a crime against the Order as the owners but an affront against the Virgin Mary herself, Bosio narrated how Fra Samati's arm miraculously dried up, leading the scared priest to confess and return the gem he had stolen. The Order opted to banish the priest instead of executing him for the sacrilege, so that his maimed arm could bear witness to the Virgin's miracle, also thinking that it was more efficient to rely on the Virgin's punishment than issue their own.<sup>600</sup>

The knights believed that the Virgin of Philermos, an icon they had brought with them from Rhodes and one of only three items they took with them when they left Malta in 1798, was able to intercede for them in battle. Successful forays against the enemy were generally followed by thanksgiving ceremonies in St John's. After the successful raids of the castles of Lepanto and Patras during the Wignacourt Magistracy, the keys of both forts were placed as ex-votos in the chapel of Philermos, with accompanying inscriptions over silver plaques.<sup>601</sup> In 1614, also during the Wignacourt period, the equally miraculous Virgin of Mellieħa in the northern part of Malta was credited with having conjured an entire army to counteract an attempted enemy raid on her shrine. Fra Bartolomeo dal Pozzo wrote that this image of the Virgin had been painted by the Evangelist St Luke when he was shipwrecked on the island with St Paul, attributing twice the holiness to it as a work executed by the same hands that wrote the gospels.<sup>602</sup> Unleashing an army or punishing a thief was certainly within the remit of what an image of the Virgin could do, but for the true believers circumspect for the tiniest sign, much less than that was sufficient to confirm the magnetic transfer of the Virgin into one of her representations. In 1534, in the Hospitaller commandery of San Giovanni Battista al Tempio in Pistoia, a fourteenth-century fresco of the Madonna del Rastrello as it later came

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<sup>599</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano Parte Terza* (Roma: Facciotti, 1602).

<sup>600</sup> Bosio III, 376; on similar miracles in Italy see also: Carroll, Michael P., *Madonnas That Maim Popular Catholicism in Italy Since the Fifteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1992).

<sup>601</sup> De Giorgio, Cynthia, 'The Chapel of the Virgin of Philermos', *Treasures of Malta* 50, Easter (2011), 60.

<sup>602</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 593.

to be known, shifted her gaze sideways to the awe of pilgrims.<sup>603</sup> These narratives were not unique to the Order. On the contrary, they were the norm. Furthermore, the medieval tradition of miraculous Madonnas seems to have been unperturbed by the Counter-Reformation control of religious materiality, if not strengthened by the diffusion of printed narratives and replicas as the next examples shall illustrate. One method of universalizing a cult thus relied on fostering devotion by overlapping particular and universal, not only in terms of rites but also by likening locations: the Loreto of Spain or the Montserrat of Rome.

One other example with a Hospitaller connection is that of Our Lady of the Pilone in Vico, Piedmont. A medieval fresco of Our Lady of Graces painted on a pillar, for some time considered by the inhabitants to have healing powers, was suddenly rediscovered after years of neglect. Towards the end of the century, however, the people of the area 'rediscovered' it, and miracles started taking place once more. Its fame grew so much that an account of the miracles published in 1627 lists pilgrims visiting the shrine from all over the Italian peninsula and neighbouring French and Swiss territories.<sup>604</sup> Just like an early modern Lourdes or Fatima, thanks to the image of the Virgin, the blind could see, the lame could walk, and the dumb could speak. Furthermore, it seemed the Virgin could soften the hearts of enemies and bring peace. Within months of the first miracles in 1592, the resident knight of the nearby Murello commandery, Fra Girolamo Pensa, a native of Mondovi, composed and published a book of spiritual poems (1696) to disseminate the cult of the Virgin of Vico.<sup>605</sup> He wrote that they were destined as a votive for the graces received, though it is not clear if he himself had made the vow or if it was an offering on behalf of the entire community.

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<sup>603</sup> Annabasi, Giulia, Martini, Simone, *Il Tempio di Pistoia, Lo spedale, la chiesa e la magione di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano dal XI and XXI Secolo* (Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2018).

<sup>604</sup> Malabaila, Filippo, *Historia dell'immagine di Nostra Donna del Mondovi a Vico* (Mondovi: Gio. Tomaso Rossi, 1627).

<sup>605</sup> Pensa, Girolamo, *Rime Spirituali del Signor Fra Girolamo Pensa comendator, e Sig. di Murello, Destinate per voto a la Sacra Colonna de la Santissima Reina de le gratie del Mondovi a Vico* (Torino: Bon Manzolino, 1596).





Historians have argued that neighbouring parishes and religious sites were often preferred to long-distance pilgrimage.<sup>606</sup> This resulted in a greater clericalization of shrines, as the clergy sought to shift the focus on parochial religious life whilst controlling devotional practices more closely. There were other instances where the same process is taking place in the commanderies as well, such as the *Santuario di Nostra Signora della Corona di Monte Baldo*, in the Hospitaller commandery of San Vitale di Verona.

A sacred history of Our Lady of the Crown from the seventeenth century reveals the process of an exponent of the Order striving to secure the patronage of the local baron to consolidate and augment devotion towards this particular invocation, to possibly draw a greater number of pilgrims to the competitive Italian scene. Fra Andrea Vigna's *Notizia Storica della Madonna della Corona in Monte Baldo nella Chiesa della Commenda di S. Vitale di Verona spettante al S. Ordine Gerosolimitano* (1668)<sup>607</sup> was successful enough to be reprinted again in Malta by the Order a century later (1771). The Sanctuary itself was included in the first version of Wilhelm Gumpfenberg's *Atlas Marianus* (1657),<sup>608</sup> which originally listed 100 Marian shrines in Europe containing miraculous images. Andrea Vigna, who was the rector of the Church of Our Lady of Monte Baldo, wrote this short book with the help of the Capuchin Giacomo da Bussolengo, who was the first to collect historical information on the cult of the Virgin. The narrative starts in Rhodes, where for ninety years, the knights and people of the city venerated a statue of the Virgin that had been the site of many miracles. When Rhodes was besieged and conquered by the Ottomans in 1522, some Turks started sacking the houses and churches, despite the Sultan's promise that the knights could leave with their belongings. Some Rhodiots took refuge in the church where this statue was venerated, but the Turks entered the church with the intent of destroying everything in their path. Suddenly, the statue of the Virgin disappeared, and those people would not see it again. Meanwhile, the knights were ousted from Rhodes. That same night, however, in a field on the Monte Baldo (close to

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<sup>606</sup> Tingle cited Sauzet, Nelson, Provost, and Martin: Tingle, 6.

<sup>607</sup> Vigna, Andrea, *Notizia Storica della Madonna della Corona in Monte Baldo nella Chiesa della Commenda di S. Vitale di Verona spettante al S. Ordine Gerosolimitano* (Verona: Gio. Battista Merlo, 1668).

<sup>608</sup> Gumpfenberg, Wilhelm, *Atlas Marianus sive de imaginibus Deiparae per Orbem Christianum miraculosis* (Ingolstadt: Georg Haenlin, 1657).

Lago di Garda in the province of Verona), a bright light appeared, brighter than the sun, 'illuminating with bright splendour the darkness of the night, and through the thick vegetation, into which the sun with its rays perhaps had never even penetrated'.<sup>609</sup> The thick vegetation, in Vigna's words '*opacità delle selve*', was a Dantesque reference to sin that was defeated by the light of grace. From the bright light, a statue emerged of the Virgin with the dead Christ on her lap. (Fig.24)

In the morning, the field was swarming with villagers from the neighbouring areas. Together they decided that it was not prudent to leave the statue out in the elements, and so they built a wooden chapel. Vigna explained how the Order became the custodian of the Sanctuary in Monte Baldo. The fame of the Virgin of the Crown was so great that many pilgrims from Italy and Germany went to pray there, including some knights of St John. Vigna wrote that these knights recognised the statue as being the same one that had disappeared from Rhodes, and wanted to be its custodians once more. They asked permission to be granted the rectorship of the site, which was given to them. The sanctuary was subjected to the administration of the commandery of San Vitale of Verona.<sup>610</sup> Further sources that are cited by Vigna include the Marian Atlas by Gumpfenberg, who wrote about two images that miraculously disappeared from Rhodes in 1522, one was the icon of Our Lady of Damascus, which was found in Malta, and the other was the statue of the Virgin of the Crown. Vigna cited as further proof the dedication inscribed at the bottom of the statue that reads '*Hoc opus fecit fieri Ludovicus de Castro Barco anno 1432*' saying that there was a knight of Rhodes by that name. Another testimony cited by Vigna is that of the Capuchin Patrizio da Venezia from the nearby convent of Caprino who wrote:

*'Whilst I, Fra Patrizio da Verona lay Capuchin, was in those time on a Christian ship on my way to the Levant, our vessel met a Turkish corsair ship, and after a long fight we were beaten and were made their captives, so I was their slave for seven and a half months in the year 1625. During this time, I happened to find myself in the city of Rhodes and had the occasion to speak of many things to some old Greeks from that place, who told me that in that City there was a statue of the Virgin, sculpted in marble, in the sorrowful act of having her son dead in her*

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<sup>609</sup> Vigna, 11.

<sup>610</sup> A.O.M. 5909, *Commenda di San Vitale e San Sepolcro a Verona*.



Figure 23: Madonna Della Corona, Monte Baldo (Verona)



arms, a very miraculous image subject of the great devotion of those people. When in 1522 the Turks took control of the city, the statue was never seen nor found, yet many years later, they heard that it was found in the state of Veneto in Italy, but they did not know the exact place. I did not know what to reply, since I had never heard of this Blessed Virgin. When I was freed, I was inspired by God to abandon this world and take the habit of the seraphic Capuchins in the years 1627. Some years later I was in our place of Caprino, and moved by so great a personal devotion towards the Virgin, as well as by a saintly curiosity, I understood that this blessed Virgin of the Crown was the same that had departed from Rhodes, and went to see her, and as soon as I saw and contemplated her, remembering the particularities described to me by the above mentioned, I confirmed and am now certain that this is the same statue that departed from Rhodes...'<sup>611</sup>

The knights built the first church in 1540 and the image was moved there 26 years after its apparition. The Commander also built a small home for the chaplain, who was tasked with

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<sup>611</sup> Vigna, 22.

the spiritual care of the pilgrims who wanted to receive communion or confession. On the Marian feast days and Sundays of October, there was the need for three or four priests. The statue of the Virgin continued to grant more miracles over the years. In 1625, due to the number of visitors and the donations they left, the Commander of S. Vitale deemed it necessary to build a bigger church. The Order wanted to use the cult of the Virgin and the popularity of the miraculous statue to bolster the Hospitaller image and the cults of other saints. In 1653 for instance, the commander of Verona Fra Cosimo Gianfigliuzzi built a church under the title of St John the Baptist in the vicinity.<sup>612</sup> The statue is still kept in a niche of red marble, surmounted by an eight-pointed cross. One can observe also the arms of some of the commanders in many places, such as those of Fra Bernardino della Ciaja which decorated the facade of the church.

Vigna's narrative revolves around the physical description of the geography. For instance, Vigna explained how the Order transported the statue from the old chapel to the new one. The description of the events was intended to help the reader visualise how secluded the place was, with the faithful needing to fix ropes and build make-shift roads for the ceremonies to take place: *'...she came to live with rural men...in a place so unforgiving and remote...'*<sup>613</sup> The statute itself was afforded cognitive abilities, as if it was not the object that was moving but the Virgin Mary. For instance, some peasants had decided to move the image from the field beneath the cliffs to an altar they had built in the plain above. The following morning, they were amazed to discover that the statue, which had taken a considerable fatigue to carry up to the plain, had miraculously returned to the field where it originally appeared in 1522. They moved the statue a second time and it again returned to the original location. *'Mary wanted to live in the place she had chosen, and not in that chosen for her'*,<sup>614</sup> meaning that the sacrality of the space was extremely specific. Despite the other place where the statue was taken being a mere few hundred metres away, it did not carry the same sacrality for the Virgin.

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<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>613</sup> Vigna, 19.

<sup>614</sup> Vigna, 19.



Access to the site remained a problem for a long time and many tried to find alternative routes to create a road for pilgrims, so as not to have to lower them down by rope. The Capuchin Giacomo da Bussolengo told Vigna that one miracle included a tree with large strong branches, that grew overnight over a crevice in the cliffs so that it could be used by locals as a support for a bridge over the precipice. This miraculous tree also had healing powers, as crushed pieces of its bark could be added to water or wine and heal even those on whom the doctors had given up. This practice had to be accompanied by the usual Marian prayers and litany, and a genuine sense of contrition and faith. So great was the people's belief in this miracle, that in time they took all the leaves, branches and eventually even the main bark of the tree and reduced it to small shavings which they kept, as relics, in their homes. By 1650, nothing was left of the tree, so a column was built in its stead to support the bridge.<sup>615</sup> The Marian cult had a strong relationship with nature. Our Lady of Salceda in Monte Celia was one other example mentioned earlier in this chapter. Apparitions that involve trees, caves, water sources or mountains were a widespread phenomenon, frequently involving a backdrop of religious warfare as well, with the Virgin revealing herself to the righteous in a place and manner of her choosing. In Spain alone, there are a large number of Marian cults with similar miraculous narratives,<sup>616</sup> some even present in Hospitaller commanderies. In Guadalajara, not too far from the Salceda, the Order owned a hermitage dedicated to the Virgen del Saz, which also conserved a statute of Mary discovered in a tree trunk. In Villarubra de los Ojos (Ciudad Real), the sanctuary of the Virgen de la Sierra was built around a representation of the Virgin from the seventh century, also discovered in a tree. The Virgen de la Sierra was so popular among knights from that area that it was the patron saint of all Hospitaller territories in La Mancha.<sup>617</sup>

At times, the Virgin's will was expressed in a much more direct manner, simply with a written note. On 8 September 1627, Fra Giaime Zummo met a few of his friends, all members of the

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<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>616</sup> For a discussion on Marian Shrines and Nature in Spain, specifically Catalonia, see: Alves, Abel A., 'The Sanctification of Nature in Marian Shrines in Catalonia: Contextualizing Human Desires in a Mediterranean Cult' in De Silva (ed.) *The Sacralization of Space and Behaviour*, 161-176; On Marian miracles in Spain see: Devaney, Thomas C., 'Everyday Miracles in Seventeenth-Century Spain', in *Lived Religion and Everyday Life in Early Modern Hagiographic Material*, Kuuliala, Peake and Räsänen-Schröder (eds.) (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 189-214.

<sup>617</sup> See: Alvarado Plana, Javier and Salazar Acha, Jaime de (eds.), *La Orden de Malta en España* (2 vols.) (Madrid: Sanz y Torres, 2015).

Confraternity of Charity of Palermo. Among the members of the confraternity, composed principally of nobles, there was also the knight Fra Vincenzo Landolina from Noto.<sup>618</sup> As it was the feast day of the birth of the Virgin, after mass and communion in the confraternity's oratory, the chaplain Don Giovanni Guadagnino brought a small statue of the child Virgin Mary wrapped in swaddling clothes as a tool for prayer and meditation. The brothers Fra Giaime and Fra Nicola Zummo were planning to open a female monastery in Palermo and hoped to obtain the assistance and patronage of their confreres in the Confraternity of Charity. While they were praying around the statue, they noticed a folded paper tucked in between the swaddles that wrapped the Virgin, and they curiously opened it to read a message that encouraged them to open said monastery. Without hesitation, they interpreted that note as a command given to them by the Virgin Mary herself, and they immediately set about erecting the monastery.<sup>619</sup>

So far, most examples concern cults from the Italian and Iberian peninsulas (or Spanish Italy such as Milan and Palermo), but one must not leave out France and what was possibly the most popular French Marian invocation present in Hospitaller Malta, the Notre Dame de Liesse. Like its Spanish and Italian counterparts, Liesse (meaning joy) is also centred around a miraculous statue of the Virgin, thought to be a faithful copy of the French counterpart destroyed in the revolution of 1789.

The cult of Liesse for the Order did not only survive throughout the knights' tenure in Malta but was woven into Malta's devotional identity. The main reason is made evident by the fact that in the 1621 edition of the *History of the Order*, Bosio reserved ten full pages to tell its story.<sup>620</sup> He was not the first to publish the narrative, not even within the Order. His source seems to be Fra Melchiorre Bandini, former Vice-Chancellor of the Order who published the account in Paris in 1445.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Joined the Order in 1612: Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 198-99.

<sup>619</sup> Mongitore, Antonio, *Memorie Istoriche della Fondazione del Venerbil Monasterio di S. Maria di tutte le Grazie nella Città di Palermo...* (Palermo: Domenico Cortese, 1710), 4.

<sup>620</sup> Bosio, *Dell'Istoria* (1621), 128-138.

<sup>621</sup> Although Bosio quoted the story from Bandini, he was very critical of the source. According to him, Bandini was not knowledgeable in the history of the Order and carelessly misrepresented where and when these miracles took place. Bosio (1621), 138; Vella, Theresa, 'Paintings of the Liesse Legend Cycle', in *Ta Liesse Malta's Waterfront shrine for Mariners*, Giovanni Bonello (ed.) (Malta: Gutenberg P., 2020), 110.

The chronicle recounted how three Hospitaller brothers from Laon, Picardie, were stationed in Syria and captured in 1134. The three brothers were offered to the Sultan of Egypt as slaves, who tried everything in his power to break their will and force them to renounce their faith. When promises of riches and threats of horrible deaths failed, he sent his beautiful daughter Ismeria to seduce them, in a bid to compel them to break their vows. The young knights did not give in, instead, they involved Ismeria in a theological discussion, depriving her of her 'Islamic superstition' and instilled in her a love for the Virgin Mary, in the Christian tradition. Day after day she visited them, yearning to know more about the Blessed Virgin, to the point that she desired so much to have an image of her. Ismeria offered to help the knights escape if they agreed to engrave an image of the Virgin in wood. The knights accepted, despite not knowing how to sculpt. That night, they prayed to the heavens for assistance and fell asleep. The next morning, there was a statue of Mary, which the knights called Our Lady of Joy, *Liesse* in French, whilst the block of wood the princess had brought them was still untouched. Ismeria was so captivated by this miracle, but more specifically by the beauty of the statue, that she expressed her desire to become a Christian. That same night she and the three knights escaped the prison in a story reminiscent of the escape of St Peter. After a series of visions and miracles, the four youths were transported by angels to the knights' homeland in France, where they built a church to host the sacred image of the Lady of Joy. As with the Veronese counterpart, the statue chose the location where the church was to be built, in this case by becoming incredibly heavy in the hands of the knights when they were on the chosen spot.<sup>622</sup> *Liesse* became so popular that Bosio compared its fame in France with that of Loreto in Italy.<sup>623</sup>

Bosio used this example to explain the relationship between object, place, and grace:

*'The great merciful Lord, who from major sins and the gravest excesses of man, often extracts a greater good... wanted to enrich France with one of the most noble, dear and precious gifts*

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<sup>622</sup> Bosio (1592), 18; *'Ma il grande Iddio, ch'alle volte da' maggiori peccati, e da' più gravi eccessi de gl'huomini, maggior bene cavar ne suole...arricchir volle la France d'uno de più nobili, cari e pretiosi doni, e celesti pegni, ch'ella habbia, cioè della stupenda, e miracolosa Imagine della Madonna Santissima di Liesse...'*

<sup>623</sup> Bosio (1621), 138

*and heavenly keepsakes that it has, that is, the wonderful and miraculous Image of Our Holy Madonna of Liesse...'*<sup>624</sup>

It logically follows that, like the textual descriptions, early visual representations of the Virgin of Liesse place the statue at centre stage, surrounded by representations of salient points from the story of Ismeria and the three knights.<sup>625</sup> In Malta, the cult seems to have been introduced by Grand Master Wignacourt, to whom Bosio's 1621 edition of the *Istoria* was dedicated. Wignacourt's gift or *goia* upon his election to the Magistracy was in the form of a set of liturgical vestments for St John's Church showcasing scenes from the story of our Lady of Joy.<sup>626</sup> His greatest contribution, however, seems to be that of inspiring those close to him, particularly knights from the Langue of France, to likewise become patrons and contribute to the cult of Liesse in Malta. The original church of Liesse was built in 1620 by Fra Jacques Chenù du Bellay, nephew of Wignacourt, Seneschal and Bailiff of Armenia. Fra Perin du Bus, who wrote to the Bosio brothers about St Marcouf and had recently died when the altar was built, was *sotto maestro di casa* to Wignacourt. Above all, the church of Liesse was the last touch to Wignacourt's Porta Marina project and went on to become a Hospitaller 'Porto Salvo', obtaining a great importance in all religious ceremonies that involved the navy. By the mid-seventeenth century, the feast of Our Lady of Liesse, particularly the one in July,<sup>627</sup> was fairly established in Malta, being a day of great jubilation among the populace.<sup>628</sup>

Though the introduction of the cult of Liesse in Malta could be attributed to Alof de Wignacourt's devotion, the greatest boost was given by Grand Master Lascaris, who followed Wignacourt in giving yet another set of seven liturgical capes to St John's as his *gioia*. The Lascaris set has survived and is in itself a testament to the relationship with Bosio's text since six of the seven capes recount scenes from the narrative of Ismeria, embroidered in silk and gold thread.<sup>629</sup> Beneath each embroidered scene is a cartouche describing the scene in Latin,

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<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>625</sup> Examples include Nicolas Prévost (1571-1599) *Histoire de l'Image de Notre Dame de Liesse* in print form and the sixteenth-century tableau in the parish church of Saint-Léger, Delincourt. See: Vella, 110-111.

<sup>626</sup> These have not been identified so far: Vella, 111.

<sup>627</sup> The Order celebrated two feasts of the Virgin in the church of Liesse, one on the second Saturday of May and one known as the Visitation on 2 July. They also commemorated St Louis on 25 August; A.O.M. 1952, f.231.

<sup>628</sup> Bonello, Giovanni (ed.), *Ta Liesse Malta's Maritime Shrine for Mariners* (Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2020).

<sup>629</sup> For images and a description of each, see: Vella, 115.

though only one is still legible: 'APARET NOCTV ISMERIAE BEATA VIRGO MARIA'. Lascaris had such a deep personal devotion towards the invocation of Liesse that he also commissioned five vignettes with scenes from the story of Ismeria and the three knights for the entrance to the Grand Masters' bedroom in the Magistral Palace.<sup>630</sup> The theme was particularly appropriate, particularly the central vignette in trompe l'oeil that shows the three knights and the Egyptian princess in their divine slumber over a large cloud as they are being miraculously transported by angels from the shores of the Nile to Picardie. It was a literal heterotopia that the Grand Masters saw every day as they went to sleep. Despite the importance that the cult incrementally obtained throughout the seventeenth century, the Langue of France still retained St Paul as the titular saint of their national chapel in St John's. The langue thus presented a universal saint in the main sacred space of the Order and reserved Our Lady of Joy for special veneration outside St John's.<sup>631</sup>

The presence of miraculous images, even copies as in the Valletta Liesse church, often warranted the promotion of ancillary cults, to varying degrees of success. Among the Bosio papers conserved by Fra Carlo Aldobrandini is a hagiography of *San Marcolfo*,<sup>632</sup> accompanied by a letter from Fra Gio Ottone Bosio, the Order's vice-chancellor, to his brother Giacomo, the historian.<sup>633</sup> In the letter dated March 1624, Gio Ottone wrote that French Commander Fra Louis du Perin du Bus had just paid for the erection of an altar to St Marcouf in the church of Our Lady of Liesse.<sup>634</sup> With the letter and hagiography, Fra du Bus hoped to have the establishment of the cult of St Marcouf documented in the next volume of Bosio's history, a volume that Giacomo was clearly working on but never completed. One must not underestimate the contribution that the eventual documentation of the cult would have had in preserving the cult in Malta. St Marcouf, an important saint in France whose relics were used in the coronation ritual in Rheims, was the saint associated with the healing from

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<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>631</sup> A similar case takes place when the Castellany of Amposta (Langue of Aragon) built the church of Our Lady of Pilar in 1670, while keeping St George as their langue's patron in St John's.

<sup>632</sup> Aldob. Arch. MS 5

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>634</sup> The altar painting is dated 1623: Fenech Sevasta Eric, 'L'Enigmatico Cassarino and St Maurus Healing a Sick Child' in *Ta Liesse Malta's Maritime Shrine for Mariners*, Giovanni Bonello (ed.) (Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2020), 195.

scrofula and the belief in the king's touch who was thought to receive the same healing powers as the saint.

Despite Fra du Bus' patronage, the Order seems to have eventually forgotten this saint. The eighteenth-century *Relazione delle Chiese della Santa Religione Gerosolimitana*<sup>635</sup> gives a description of Liesse and says that the altar to the right-hand side of the titular painting of Our Lady was dedicated to St Maclou (St Malo).<sup>636</sup> It was, thus, another saint entirely, albeit one with a similar name and equally known for miraculous healing. The Order did not celebrate this saint's feast, though it did commemorate St Louis of France, represented in the opposite altar, on 25 August.<sup>637</sup>

It is interesting to note how national cults accompany each other as a way to sustain a less popular cult by relying on a stronger and better-documented cult. Accompanying the Montserrat cult in the Gargallo chapel in Rome was that of St Raymond Peñyafort, whilst Fra Gianfigliuzzi wanted to associate the cult of St John the Baptist with that of the Virgin of the Crown in Monte Baldo. Not least of all, in 1625, Fra Giovanni Francesco Abela attempted to establish the cult of St Trophimus in Valletta by erecting a chapel to this saint in the Zoccolanti church.<sup>638</sup> The altar was originally dedicated to St Januarius of Naples, but Abela rededicated it to St Trophimus, a disciple of St Paul, believing that the saint remained in Malta when the Apostle left the island.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> A.O.M. 1953

<sup>636</sup> A.O.M. 1953 Lib. IV, Cap XXVIII, f.211. The Bosio letter that directly mentions '*mal di scrofoli*' and the accompanying hagiography leave little doubt as to the original dedication of the altar. Fenech Sevasta on the other hand writes of St Maurice, a saint generally associated with St Placidus, was greatly celebrated within the Order seeing how his relics were discovered in the commandery church of Messina. Both Maurice and Placidus were among the first students of St Benedict and in the Roman calendar shared the feast date on 5 October. Whether the later change in attribution was mistaken or intentional is not clear from the sources but it has gone unnoticed in recent publications on the church of Liesse, notably by Fenech Sevasta who also mistakenly hypothesised that the altar was erected by Fra Chenu de Ballay who built the church: Fenech Sevasta, 197.

<sup>637</sup> A.O.M. 1953, f.211.

<sup>638</sup> Abela, 239.

<sup>639</sup> This information was obtained from Cesare Baronio, possibly through Constantino Gaetani, however, it was later found not to be exact.

## *Translatio*

Much has been said about movement that is the product of deep meditation or perceived to originate from a holy object or space. There was, however, another type of movement that was far more frequent. The *translatio*, Latin for ‘changing location’, is a Catholic ritual that deals exclusively with the movement of holy relics, be it on a special occasion, as part of a saint’s feast, or to give them a permanent location following their gifting or discovery (*inventio*). The act of movement of a sacred object from one place to another, whether the object was miraculous or not, always gave rise to a beginning or an increase in veneration. A good example of this involves the *translatio* of the relic of St Ursula to Gozo. In 1610, the newly-appointed Hospitaller governor of the island, Fra Eugenio Ramirez Maldonado, carried the relic of the saint with the corresponding reliquary bust, him from his native Salamanca to his new posting.<sup>640</sup> When Maldonado was relieved from his appointment in 1613, he took the bust with him to Malta. Those on the Island of Gozo, who had grown fond of the relic and nurtured devotion towards this saint, sent a letter to their ex-governor asking for the relic of St Ursula and Maldonado accepted. On Gozo, it became the focal point of a cult which resulted in the proclamation of St Ursula as the patron saint of the island by the Diocesan Synod that met in 1620.<sup>641</sup>

It was essential for the early modern author to document the physical act of *translatio*, whether natural or supernatural, pious or profane. This included the place of origin and arrival, who performed the act of transfer, and the nature of the journey.<sup>642</sup> The act of *translatio* is in essence at the heart of the *Città Rituale*, crucial for *metanoia* and the best example to explain the merger of meditative flexibility with ritualistic precision. One might be tempted to argue that the Order of St John, being *sui generis*, was somehow different or unique in the way they ‘moved’. However, the whole point for arguing that the Order of St John was a text-book case study for the particularisation of the universal is that they were

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<sup>640</sup> Bezzina, Joseph, ‘Sant’Orsla, Patruna ta’ Ghawdex 1614-2014’, *Il-Għid tal-Assunta*, 48 (2013), 5-16.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>642</sup> Dekoninck (2018), 245.

becoming increasingly more receptive to a standardised and centralised expression of faith, as the Magistracy took a greater role in the devotional life of the knights.<sup>643</sup>



Figure 24: Reliquary and Relic of St Ursula donated to Gozo by Fra Maldonado, Polychromed Wood, Naples [?], early seventeenth century.

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<sup>643</sup> On the Order's relics in the Medieval period, see: Borowski, Tomasz and Gerrard, Christopher, 'Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages: Relics, Religiosity, and the Military Orders', *Speculum*, 92 (4) (2017), 1056-1100.



Contrary to images, relics were not representational of a saint, but that saint in real presence, either in body in the case of first-degree relics (*ex ossibus*) or some kind of material that is closely associated with the saint (*ex indumentis*). This implies two things, the first being that a fragment of a bone or piece of clothing formed part of a larger whole, spread over several locales, and therefore the possessor of that fragment was in communion with others who similarly had the other fragments, together forming one whole. Second, two or more saints could be invoked concurrently, generally to intercede with miracles that were evocative of the ones they performed in life. The relics of Brother Gerard, founder of the Order, were originally kept in the city of Manosque in Provence. They were considered miraculous and brought out in procession whenever a calamity befell that city.<sup>644</sup> They were generally kept in the castle's chapel, meaning that they were not only kept safe from the enemy but were also generally inaccessible to Mansoque's faithful. This practice made the occasions in which they were brought out for veneration even more special.

There were instances, however, when the situation was so desperate that a congregation would bring out the whole array of relics they possessed. During the plague procession of Milan, Carlo Borromeo invoked Christ directly with a/the relic of the Holy Nail; in the subsequent Maltese plague processions of 1592-93, the list of invocations was much longer:

*'to placate the heavily anger... they [the knights] had also done several public and devout processions, carrying through the streets three pieces of the True Cross upon which Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, the hand of the precursor St John the Baptist, with which our patron pointed towards the Lamb of God, a leg of St Lazarus Bishop and martyr disciple of the Lord, the body of St Euphemia Virgin and Martyr, the Thorn that pierced the head of Christ, the finger of Mary Magdalene,(Fig.27) the arm of St George, the arm of St Stephen, the arm of St John the Almoneer, two heads from the two-thousand Virgins, a hand of St Claire, a hand of St Anne, the relic of St Placido, the relics of St Cosmas and Damian, the relic of St Vittorino, the relic of St Pantaleon, a piece of the nose of St John the Baptist placed in a fine golden plate*

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<sup>644</sup> N.L.M., MS. 142, Vol. IV, 41.

decorated with many stones and precious jewels (Fig.25), three cases of relics of many saints and many other relics with which this Religion was always favoured by the Pontiffs.’<sup>645</sup>



Figure 25: Relic of the Nose of St John the Baptist on a Golden Plate, watercolours from a 1756 inventory, A.C.M., MS150. Courtesy: Mdina Cathedral Museum (above), and Relic of the Finger of St Mary Magdalene (left)

<sup>645</sup> Parisi, 15-16. ‘...si conducevano per le publiche strade tre pezzi del Vero Legno della Santa Croce, nella quale fu crocefisso Nostro Signore Giesu Christo. La mano con che il Precursor Santissimo Gio. Battista, Padrone tutelare di essa Sacra Religione mostro l’Agnello di Dio, un piede di San Lazaro Vescovo, e Martire amico (p.16) e Discepolo di N. Sig. Il Corpo di Santa Eufemia Vergine e Martire Laza Spina che trafisse il capo di Christo, il Digno della Maddalena, Il braccio di Santo Giorgio, Il braccio di San Stefano, Il braccio di San Giovanni Elemosinario, due testa delle due mila Vergini, una mano di santa Clara, una mano di Sant’Anna, la Reliquia di S. Placido, La Reliquia di Santo Cosimo e Damiano, La Reliquia di San Vittorino, La Reliquia di San Pantaleone, una parte del naso di San Giovanni Battista, che sta in un piatto d’oro finissimo adornato di molte pietre e gioie preziose, e tre cassette piene di reliquie di diversi santi, e molte altre reliquie delle quali essa Religione e stata sempre favorita da Sommi Pontefici.’

Figure 26: Rib of St Ubaldesca, Sijena.



This final note on the favour by the pontiffs is a reference to the point made above in relation to the closeness that relic gifting entailed. In 1609, for instance, Pope Paul V donated a small pectoral cross engraved with symbols of the Passion containing relics and a splinter of the True Cross to the church of the Grotto of St Paul in Malta and sent them yet another in 1611.<sup>646</sup> In a similar vein, in 1578, Grand Master Verdalle gifted the Hospitaller female monastery of Sijena in Spain some bone shards from the head of St Stephen, from the arm of St Eufemia and the neck of St Helen in recognition of the monastery's loyalty to him.<sup>647</sup> (Fig. 26) The connectivity that relics created went beyond possessing them; sometimes being in their presence was all that mattered. Naples is famous for its miracles of liquefaction of the

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<sup>646</sup> An inscription is still visible at the bottom of the crucifix, see: Azzopardi, John, *St Paul Grotto and the Pauline Cult 1600-1624, Pope Paul V, Juan Benegas de Cordova and Grand Master Aloph de Wignacourt* (exhibition catalogue, Malta: 2006), 9.

<sup>647</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 158.

blood of saints; but while the blood of St Januarius is the most famous relic, it was not the only one capable of such supernatural signs. The monastery of San Gregorio Armeno had a vial of blood believed to be that of St John the Baptist, that each year turned to liquid during a ceremony held on 1 August. In 1586, Grand Master Verdalle ordered that every year, all knights residing in Naples on that day had to be present at San Gregorio Armeno and had to wear their *manto da punta* as was customary for all solemn feasts held in St John's in Malta.<sup>648</sup>

Similar to the gifting of relics, theft also entailed movement, yet contrary to the donation of relics, thefts ruptured this connectivity. The theft of a relic was not only considered a sin against the saint directly, possibly unleashing the wrath of that saint, as we have seen with the case involving Our Lady of Philermos but also the severing of a channel that showered the community with divine graces. At times, this fragmentation was not just spiritual but quite literal, as well. In 1580, the minor relic of a piece of the nose of St John the Baptist, along with its golden plate reliquary, was stolen by a cleric named Fra Vincenzo Pesaro. He subsequently proceeded to break the reliquary into smaller pieces to hide them more easily.<sup>649</sup> He was first dismissed from the Order and then condemned to death, though thanks to some connections he had in Rome, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

In the context of the universal and particular, the donation of relics was not merely done to strengthen religious and political ties, but also to export the cults of saints, since their arrival would bolster the visibility of that particular saint in the region. In 1586, Grand Master Verdalle wanted to promote the cult of Hospitaller saints, particularly St Ubaldesca, to whom he was personally devout. He asked the Prior of Pisa Fra Giulio Zanchini, whom we have mentioned in connection to the Camerata, to facilitate the episcopal permissions to have some bones from the body of that saint, conserved in the female Hospitaller monastery of Pisa, transferred to Malta. Dal Pozzo gave a detailed description of this transfer, first by land to Livorno and then by sea to Malta, a task entrusted to the senior mariner Fra Ottavio de Castellane Salernes.<sup>650</sup> The various pieces of her relics, which Verdalle then gave to different

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<sup>648</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 276.

<sup>649</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 174.

<sup>650</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 275.

churches as he saw fit,<sup>651</sup> were a stepping-stone in the exponential growth of the cult of a female saint of the Order in Malta and in other Hospitaller commanderies. (*Fig. 29*)

Initially, this involved a plenary indulgence on the day of the *translatio*. In the years after, a church built in Casal Paola by the homonymous Grand Master De Paule (r.1623-26) was dedicated to saint Ubaldesca, the only one the Order ever dedicated to one of its saints. By 1672, the Order was seeking to extend the liturgical celebration by having a proper Office of the saint in the conventual chaplains' rubric, rather than a generic one for virgin saints.<sup>652</sup> Eventually in 1683, her feast in St John's was elevated to a Pontifical one as bequeathed in the pious foundation of Fra Carlo Gattola.<sup>653</sup> Being able to carry a relic, to move it not only inside the church but also around the city, was a very important aspect of the life of relics. In 1560, when Grand Master de Vallette ascended the Magistracy, he wanted to inspect the relics in the *Tolo*, one by one. In doing so, he discovered that the body of St Euphemia, a very important relic for the Langue of Italy with a homonymous bailiwick dedicated to it in Calabria, was lacking a proper *theca* (case/box) and therefore the sacred contents could be at risk if taken out on procession. He commissioned a new reliquary case for the saint's bones in gilded silver.<sup>654</sup>

The discovery of relics had a legitimising function. The appointment of Verdalle to the cardinalate in 1588 seems to have spurred in him a great desire to strengthen the Order's devotions, both in terms of ritual and materiality. As was mentioned earlier, on his way back to Malta from his elevation to Cardinal in Rome, Verdalle passed through Messina where he had the occasion to visit the Order's commandery church in that city. It was on this occasion that he instructed the Prior, Fra Rinaldo di Naro, to do some works in the church, which, as we have seen, included the relocation of the main altar to a more central location.<sup>655</sup> The discovery of the bodies of saints Placido, Eutico, Vittorino, and Flavia could not have come at a better time for Verdalle. Placido was a Benedictine abbot, a close associate of St Benedict himself, who was martyred along with three members of his congregation and several other

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<sup>651</sup> He gave one to the Monastery of St Ursula in Valletta and another to the monastery of Sijena.

<sup>652</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.95.

<sup>653</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.95; Dal Pozzo (1703), 275.

<sup>654</sup> Bosio III, 442.

<sup>655</sup> N.L.M., MS.235, f.18; Gatto, Simona, 'Grandiose feste nella citta di Messina tra il XVI e XVIII sec.' *Journal of Baroque Studies* Vol 1(2), 2014, 103-124.

monks. Their burial site had been forgotten for centuries and the timing of their fortuitous discovery could easily be perceived as a sign of divine providence. For Verdalle, these numerous holy bones not only greatly enlarged the treasure of relics that the Order possessed in Messina but were also a trophy for his own Magistracy. As one might expect, he quickly wrote to the Holy See to request a few of those bones for the Conventual Church in Malta.<sup>656</sup>

Meanwhile, in Messina, a sumptuous ephemeral celebration was being prepared and St John's Square was at the heart of the ritual. Filippo Gotho, a Messinese nobleman, described the passage of the *corteo* with the relics that departed from the Order's commandery and passed under several arches, the main roads, and along the shoreline.<sup>657</sup> Based on this description, Simona Gatto reconstructed the route they took on a period map, thereby demonstrating how the ritual encapsulated the entire city, blessing its gateways, the main streets, and the fortifications in particular.<sup>658</sup> What is most striking about the descriptions provided is how much materiality was involved in the *translatio*:

*'...the main streets were decorated with damasks and crimson ermines, and many other colours, with paintings and friezes, with frames and fresh leaves; they also erected many triumphal arches with paintings and large paintings with symbols and mottoes that reflected the people's devotion and happiness. In the middle of the Square of St John they erected half a theatre, octagonal in shape for sturdiness, which had a semicircle in the shape of an old orchestra, and in that they adored the relics of the Martyr saints, reposed in four urns richly covered in the finest cloth of gold; and with an artificial sky from which descended three choirs of angles singing sweetly and harmoniously. In the following days the Triumph [monument] was ordered, preceded by a beautiful carriage pulled by four horses, upon which sat a crowned putto with an unscathed scimitar in his right hand, representing martyrdom, which was then followed by a number of other crowned putti with scarves and wings to resemble angles, that held aloft paintings on plates that showed the miracles that were seen since the discovery of*

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<sup>656</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235, f.18; They were translated to Malta on 5 August 1589. By papal decree, 5 August remained the day the Order celebrated St Placido and companions in Malta.

<sup>657</sup> Gotho, Filippo, *Breve raguaglio dell'Inventione, e Feste de' gloriosi Martirj Placido, e Compagni mandato al Seren.mo Don Filippo d'Allstria Principe di Spagna da Filippo Gotho Cavaliere Messinese* (Messina: Fausto Bufalini, 1591).

<sup>658</sup> Gatto (2014), 120; Fig. 4.



*these saints. Following them in order were the confraternities of the villages with their crosses and standards, with many lit torches, followed then by those of the city pompously with many lights, and singing hymns with voices and instruments about the cruel death of the martyrs.*<sup>659</sup>

Apart from these extraordinary circumstances, the movement and veneration of relics of the Order were governed by a very exacting ritual that was observed annually or weekly, generally in the same manner. As with other religious orders, the liturgical practices reflected a meeting point between universal and particular practices, as they were dictated by internal statutes or regulations, individual patronage, special privileges by the Papacy, as well as the general Catholic liturgical calendar. A case in point which is in line with what was discussed earlier in this chapter, is the Order's Passion-related rituals. The four main ones were the votive mass for the Holy Cross, the feast of the discovery of the True Cross, the feast of the Crown of Thorns, and the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The votive mass to the Holy Cross was a mass celebrated weekly on Fridays.<sup>660</sup> It was established by an old decree from 1354 but reconfirmed by Pope Paul V in 1609<sup>661</sup> as listed in Statute 19 '*Della Chiesa*'.<sup>662</sup> Mass in St John's was followed by a general procession with the relic of the True Cross and the singing of the litany of saints, with the participation of the Grand Master and Grand Crosses who kissed the relic. It seems that this particular devotion was the result of an earthquake on Rhodes: Statute 10 on processions<sup>663</sup> mentions that the Friday procession was votive for peace and against earthquakes. The other three feasts had a fixed date. The Discovery of the Cross was celebrated on 3 May and all members of the Order had to participate in the Mass, which from 1670 onwards was celebrated with greater pomp as a pontifical by foundation of

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<sup>659</sup> Bonfiglio Costanzo, Giuseppe, *Prima Parte dell'Historia Siciliana* (Venezia: Bonificio Cera, 1604), 660-661.

<sup>660</sup> With some exceptions such as the Advent, the Septuagesima until Pentecost, the octave of the feast, and the vigil of the main feasts.

<sup>661</sup> Scarabelli, Giovanni, *Il Culto della Santa Croce nell'Ordine di Malta* (Viareggio: Gran Priorato di Lombardia e Venezia del SMOM, 2009), 12.

<sup>662</sup> *Statuti della Sacra Religione Gerosolomitana* (Borgo Nuovo: Camerale, 1674), 32.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 28; Scarabelli, 12.



Figure 27: Relic of the True Cross, (Courtesy St John's Co-Cathedral)

Grand Master Nicolas Cottner.<sup>664</sup> On this occasion, the small tabernacle in the Chapel of St Michael was opened to expose the relic of the True Cross for veneration, one of three that the Order possessed.<sup>665</sup> This particular relic was one that the Order had brought with it from Rhodes. (Fig.27) Part of the ceremonies included a procession at the hour of vespers to the subterranean crypt known as Bertolotti, in suffrage for the souls of departed confreres. Similarly, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross was celebrated in pontifical by foundation of the same Cottner in 1673, and the same relic was used for an internal procession after the third hour in the liturgy. This feast was so important for the Order, that it took precedence over any other feast that coincided with it on 14 September.<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> Pontifical or High Mass is the most ritualistically elaborate mass in Catholic tradition, reserved only for the most important feasts. Therefore, the extra costs incurred in decorating the church, using different vestments and other materiality, as well as the candles, oil and music, were generally covered by a pious foundation established by a wealthy patron, thus linking individual patronage to communal ritual.

<sup>665</sup> Scarabelli, 12.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



Apart from its use in the Good Friday ceremonies, the Crown of Thorns had its own feast on 11 August.<sup>667</sup> As Bosio mentioned, this relic had been in the Order's possession at least since Rhodian times,<sup>668</sup> with its veneration growing exponentially following the miracle in front of Grand Master Milly. Its veneration did not wane during the Counter-Reformation, as demonstrated by the donation of a new reliquary in 1597 by Fra Stefano Claramunt.<sup>669</sup> Contemporary descriptions say that this reliquary was in the shape of a belfry, held by two putti with thuribles. The other reliquaries brought from Rhodes held more than one passion-related object. For instance, one was in the shape of the golden cross and had pieces of the True cross in the middle, another thorn from the Crown of Thorns, and two pieces of cloth believed to be parts of Christ's red robe from the passion.<sup>670</sup> The presence of relics in other churches of the Order resulted in parallel rituals taking place there too. Among the relics of St Paul's Grotto was a piece of the True Cross, to which a Plenary Indulgence was attached for those who visited the pilgrimage site on the feast of the discovery of the cross.

There were other similar relics in the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta and the Camerata chapel, with similar ceremonies taking place there on Good Friday. The Camerata also had a piece of the tree from the house of the High Priest Annas to which Christ was tied whilst awaiting to appear before the Sanhedrin.<sup>671</sup> In the Grand Master's private chapel in Valletta, there was also some earth from the Golgotha, kept in a *hagiotheca*<sup>672</sup> with the relics of other saints. (Fig.28) Some other items were originally intended for personal private veneration, but through the *spoglio* that took place at the death of all members of the Order, they often became objects of public veneration too. Outside Malta, the Order had more of these relics, particularly those of the True Cross. The relics possessed by the Order served as an attraction to pilgrims in that particular region, and therefore contributed to the concept of a lived religion<sup>673</sup> outside the physical confines of their *Convento* in Malta. A relic of the cross was donated to the Order during the Portuguese *Reconquista* and taken to the

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<sup>667</sup> In 1711, it was moved to 11 May.

<sup>668</sup> Zoitu, 112.

<sup>669</sup> Scarabelli, 13.

<sup>670</sup> Scarabelli, 27.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>672</sup> On the Order's pre-1530 relics, see: Buhagiar, Mario, 'Treasures of the Knights Hospitallers in 1530: Reflections and Art Historical Considerations', *Peregrinationes* Vol. 1 (2000).

<sup>673</sup> Kuuliala, Jenni, Peake, Rose-Marie and Räsänen-Schröder, Päivi (eds.), *Lived Religion and Everyday Life in Early Modern Hagiographic Material* (Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

commandery of Marmelar. This relic was considered so important in Portugal that in early modern documents, one often finds the village of Marmelar listed as *Vera Cruz*.<sup>674</sup>



Figure 28: 'Bookform' Byzantine Hagiotheca, fourteenth century. (Courtesy: Metropolitan Chapter- Mdina)

The historical element of these rituals is quite strong, with references to the Order's acquisition of the relic, its passage from Rhodes or even the Holy Land to Malta as well as ancient privileges offered to those who partook in them. With some exceptions, where the Order's chroniclers seem to have forgotten to list exact dates,<sup>675</sup> historical precedents surrounding rituals were crucial for the preservation of the particular. If anything, the passage from pre-Tridentine to post-Tridentine reaffirmed the importance of documentation in this regard. The most complete and trustworthy work produced by the Order to safeguard their spiritual privileges and ensure a standardisation and centralisation of rituals is Fra Domenico

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<sup>674</sup> On Vera Cruz de Marmelar and the commandery church, see: Adão da Fonseca, Luís, *Comendas das Ordens Militares: perfil nacional e inserção internacional Noudar e Vera Cruz de Marmelar* (Porto, Fronteira do Caos, 2013).

<sup>675</sup> Such as the case of the date of the *translatio* of St Placidus: N.L.M., MS. 235, f.96; '*Non si sa pero sin ora il giorno preciso della Translatione non trovandosi nota ne in Cancellaria di questo fatto ne memoria dell'Officio della Translazione in qualche Tabella o Breviario Vecchio*'.

Manso's *Trattato della Maggior Chiesa* (1698).<sup>676</sup> This work remained in manuscript form, only parts of it published by a modern-day conventual chaplain Fra Giovanni Scarabelli.<sup>677</sup> This dissertation has limited itself to using Manso's work as a source of information, more than for the merits of the sacred-historical exercise that Manso felt was necessary for the preservation of the particular. Nonetheless, it is being mentioned here, as a document from the very end of the seventeenth century, because of its effective manner in showing the perseverance, possibly even the growth of cults particular to the Order of St John, partly as a result of the materiality they possessed.

Apart from adding his notes, Manso copied original documents, including letters he found in the Chancery, in order to sustain his claims. This included a notarial document from 1654, produced by the then Vice-chancellor Fra Gian Francesco Abela '*a futura memoria*', detailing the *translatio* of the relics of S. Carlo Borromeo. He had as his witnesses Fra Fabrizio Cagliola (the galley chaplain) and the Order's master of ceremonies. The relics, which included part of his heart, his liver, and a piece of his famous red cardinal's cassock, were donated to Grand Master Lascaris by the new Inquisitor, Federico Borromeo and his brother the Count Renato Borromeo, descendants of the saint. The Camerata-bred Grand Master whose name is forever linked with his attempts to reign in the excesses of carnival would have certainly had the approval and support of S. Carlo had they ever coexisted; '*...since the saint, when he lived on earth, was protector of the Order in Rome, so he would protect it more efficiently now that he is in glory...*' added Manso.<sup>678</sup> On the occasion of the translation of the relics of S. Carlo from the Church of Liesse, through the Porta Marina, with a solemn procession involving all the religious orders, the Inquisitor, and the Grand Master, one could truly observe the making of Valletta as a *Città Rituale*. The importance of this ritual, as a historical precedent or blueprint, is delineated a few pages later when Manso, discussing a similar donation in 1669 of the relics of St Clement, mentioned that the Order's Council decreed that they should be received in port using the same ritual that was adopted upon the arrival of the relics of St Carlo Borromeo.<sup>679</sup> The following year, Fra Jacques Cordon d'Evieux (II), nephew of the Fra Jacques

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<sup>676</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235.

<sup>677</sup> Scarabelli, Giovanni, *Culto e Devozione dei Cavalieri a Malta* (Malta: Malta U.P., 2004).

<sup>678</sup> N.L.M., MS. 235, f.97. '*perche si come il santo mentre viveva in Terra, fu protettore della religione in Roma, cosi la poteggerebbe piu efficacemente ora glorioso in cielo.*'

<sup>679</sup> N.L.M., MS. 245, f.104.

Cordon d'Evieux, who was a member of the Camerata with Grand Master Lascaris, brought from Annecy the relics of St Francis de Salle, his uncle's spiritual director and bishop of Geneva-Annecy. Manso's *Trattato* also leads us to believe that the same ritual observed for Borromeo's relics had become a blueprint for all relics that were received in the Grand Harbour of Malta.<sup>680</sup>

Another particularly vicious outbreak of the plague in 1676 brings the discussion on the movement of relics to a full circle. Contrary to the 1592 outbreak, there seems to be a much more ritualised procedure taking place in Valletta and the harbour, with fewer relics being used. The Order chose St Sebastian, St Roque, St Rosalia and St Michael as their protectors.<sup>681</sup> The relics of St Rosalia were brought to Malta from Scicli, Sicily, by the future Grand Master Gregorio Carafa, and on that occasion too, the usual ritual took place at the port.<sup>682</sup> The date of the *translatio* was important because, as with other relics, it was kept as a yearly feast day on which the relic would once more be paraded. The absence of the relics of St Carlo from this ceremony is conspicuous. The plague featured strongly not only in the saint's iconography but also as a common driving force for the promulgation of his cult outside Malta. One other change from the 1592 plague was the absence of Passion relics, with the emphasis being more Marian than Christological. Indeed, the main supplication was addressed to the Virgin of the

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<sup>680</sup> N.L.M., MS. 245, f.105.

<sup>681</sup> N.L.M., MS. 245, f.107.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*; '...a 22 giugno di ciascun'anno giorno della sua translatione si celebri dal Mto Rev. Prior della Chiesa la sua messa, e primi vespri in Pontificale e che questa sera verso le 5 hore non potendo stante le correnti infermita' andar detto molto Rev. Priore in processione pontificalmente col solito accompagnamento di tutto il convento, vadi il vice priore con alcuni de sacerdoti e clero della Veneranda Assemblea a ricever detta Sta. Reliquia, e che per tal effetto si metto in ordine un' altaretto verso il Salvatore in terra, e fatta sbarcare, e riconosciuta la dovuta attestatione d'esser reliqua di detta santa si riponga in detto altaretto con la salva d'artilleria du tutta la squadra e cantata la sua antifona, et Oratione si conduchi processionalmente da detto Vicepriore, e facendosi in detta maggior Chiesa conventuale, et all'entrar in essa si saluti dalla Citta con tre colombrine, 4 sagri e 60 mascoli grandi, come si fece con la reliquia del Corpo di S. Clemente martire al primo di luglio 1669.

*L'essendosi osservato puntualmente quanto in detto decreto e stato ordinato segue nell'accennata hora lo sbarco della Sarria in che era riposte la statua con la Sacra Reliquia di detta Santa Rosalia Condotta sopra la felucca di detta Galera Capitana dal Capitano Comm. Fr. Giacomo Dudingho Prior di essa capitana accompagnato dalli Priori dell'altre Galere con torcie accese e nel consignarla affirmo d'esser l'istessa che dal sudetto Procuratore Sciortino d'Orinde del Ven. Prior della Roccella gli e stata consignata e cio in presenza del molto Rev. Prior della Chiesa Fr. Pietro Viany e Vener. Prior di Navarra Fra. D. Gio. Galdiano, e dopo estratta la detta reliquia e letta l'attestatione del Vicario di Mons. Arcivescovo di Pal[ermo] Sorano da me Fr. Dominco Muscato Secretario della Cancelleria e s'ebbe anco un'altra fede del Vicario del Emo. Cardinal. Arcivescovo Doni si diede segno alle Galere, et hanno fatto lo salute orinatoli con sparo di tutta l'artigleria e dopo cantata l'antifona et Oratione della Santa s'e portata dal Sudetto Vice priore e sacerdoti processionalmente in detta chiesa...'*

Immaculate Conception, for whom a new church was built instead of an old one in Floriana, known as Sarria.<sup>683</sup> On 8 December, the feast of the Immaculate, all members of the Order had to confess and receive communion, then follow in procession from St John's in Valletta to Sarria in Floriana, roughly a mile long, along with all members of the regular and secular clergy, as well as the bishop and the Inquisitor. The Order's Floriana procession seems to have taken precedence over an earlier solemnity at the Capuchin church of Floriana, which was where most knights celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception before the plague.<sup>684</sup>

While this chapter has discussed the mobility of religious materiality, one must mention cases in which the relics seem to have been obtained with the opposite intention of movement; for example, collecting. Here too, the differences from pre- to post-Reformation appear minimal. Aside from the Grand Master, who had a private collection of relics he kept in the magisterial chapel, some individual knights were also avid collectors of sacred vestiges. The Florentine Fra Giovanni Battista Rondinelli was a high-ranking member of the Order during Verdalle's magistracy. He was a hero of the siege<sup>685</sup> and had occupied, amongst other roles, the position of ambassador to the Holy See. Moreover, he was the knight responsible for organising and printing the *Statuta Hospitalis Hierusalem* in 1588. Somewhat less monumental and almost forgotten is the fact that, in 1597, Giovanni Battista Rondinelli donated a commandery *ius patronatus* to the Order.<sup>686</sup> The commandery of Sovigliana (Vinci) is indeed hard to find since it changed hands many times over the years, though fortunately its church of St John the Baptist still exists, almost intact, now annexed to an Ursuline home and kindergarten school. This small church, riddled with Rondinelli crests and eight-pointed crosses, has a chapel of relics complete with Fra Rondinelli's little-known collection of relics (*Fig.29*). The quantity of relics and the quality of the reliquaries far surpasses what one expects to find in a small countryside church on the outskirts of Empoli. It is representative of Rondinelli, his connections and his collecting. Although the relics were eventually inherited by the Order, it

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<sup>683</sup> N.L.M., MS 2. Stromata Melitense, 669; *Relazione della Chiesa della Rotonda esistente in Malta sotto titolo della Concezione Immacolata di Maria sempre Vergine detta ta Saria*.

<sup>684</sup> A.A.V., S.S. Malta, Vol. 22, f. 426, 17 December 1667; '*Domenica correndo l'Ottava della Santissima Concettione, qual festività vide ordinarmente solennizzata nella Chiesa di S. Francesco de Conventuali con straordinario concorso di Popolo, vi predico in quel giorno il Padre Busdraghi Capuccino, in altro tempo stato cavaliere Gerosolimitano, alla presenza di quasi tutti i cavalieri che si trovano in questo convento.*'; *ibid.*, Vol. 25, 1669.

<sup>685</sup> Bosio III, 637.

<sup>686</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 393.



seems they never moved, nor where they intended to, and neither did Fra Giovanni Battista Rondinelli who requested to be buried inside the same chapel of relics, next to his treasured collection.



*Figure 29: (above and overleaf) The Collection of Relics belonging to Fra Giovanni Battista Rondinelli, late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista, Spicchio-Sovigliana.*





## ***Conclusion***

Inspired by Grumppenberg, who borrowed from the theory of magnetism to explain how the Virgin's power could permeate all its artistic representations, we can figuratively take inspiration from Newton's first law of motion to explain what this chapter has attempted to demonstrate. A stationary soul cannot be moved unless an external force acts upon it. It is genuinely difficult to distinguish between conviction and mere pageantry, between devotion and ritual. Though it is near impossible to speak for each individual member, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that there was ample external force to move the Hospitaller's soul, and some, even the most adamant sinners, produced works of great beauty.

At a distance of four centuries, the historian cannot know what inhabits an actor's heart and mind, and one can only reach conclusions based on material evidence. Nevertheless, here too, this chapter has attempted to incorporate all forms of material evidence, to consider objects, images, and places alongside the written word, which is traditionally the realm of the historian. After all, one cannot deny that Christianity is obsessed with materiality and that discounting anything that is not written would be a mistake. During a podcast titled 'the big questions of religious history'<sup>687</sup>, incidentally also a non-written source, the panel led by Diarmaid MacCulloch grappled with the conundrum of whether religion was primarily about belief. The panel concluded that, although belief is important, religion is also about 'doing', implying the centrality to religion of not remaining stationary. Although it is hard to assess the religion of the Hospitallers by deconstructing what each knight, chaplain or nun contributed, it is sufficient to prove that there was indeed motion, that they moved and allowed themselves to be moved by others. From the most elaborate Sacro Monte, to a pocket-size *vade mecum*, and from great pilgrimages to exhorting letters to a cloistered community, all these were meant to move body and soul, indicative of a much deeper sentiment than what initially meets the eye. Despite the violent, less than pious world, that the early modern Hospitallers inhabited, they too were capable of moving the soul.

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<sup>687</sup> 'The big questions of religious history', part of the *History Extra* podcast series (2007-), Ep. 1435 (2022), hosted by Diarmaid MacCulloch with the participation of Carole Hillenbrand, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, and Peter Marshall.



A final note on the chapter concerns the Order's particularisation of the universal. This section started with the Order split between two leaders, and somehow between two (or more) visions of the direction that the Order had to take. Some knights asked for direct intervention, while others took the matter into their own hands. Though the political mess was sorted very quickly, the vision for a spiritual programme was much more gradual and watered down. One could add that, for all their efforts and successes, the knights of the Camerata never managed to determine the spiritual expression of the entire institution, eventually resulting in a lull in the Camerata's own activities. Even when one of their members was elected to the magistracy, he still met resistance at every corner and was much more a follower of Jesuit spirituality than a proponent of a distinct Hospitaller kind. The Order was consistently present in every major town and city in Europe and regularly in contact with members of other religious orders, and at times were patrons of the latter. Thus, it was easier for the order to pick and choose, copy, and adapt what had been enacted by others. This, as we shall see in the following section, often left the Order behind in terms of leaving its own mark on the Catholic spiritual environment: there were far fewer canonisations amongst its ranks than other orders, few substantial theological contributions, and before the mid-seventeenth century, only universal offices on feasts particular to the Order. Certain Grand Masters, starting with Aloyse de Wignacourt, increasingly felt the need to promote the Order's own understanding of religion, something that resembled a distinct vocation if not a distinct spirituality. The Order's privileges and its history depended ever more on the ability to universalise what was particular for a Hospitaller, not merely to garner support for its other activities, but as a didactic tool that unified such an assorted group of men and women.



## Part 2

On 16 December 2020, after almost a year of the coronavirus pandemic that left desolation and despair in its wake for many who lost their livelihoods or loved ones, the faithful of Naples were gathered, under strict social distancing rules, in their famous Cathedral of St Januarius (Gennaro). The liturgical ceremonies starkly contrasted those from previous years, which in the spirit of Naples, are typically baroque in every sense of the word.<sup>688</sup> Yet this small blip in the usual festivities would have all been forgotten had the much-awaited “prodigio” taken place. St Januarius is revered in the Catholic tradition as one of the saints of the first cycle of martyrdoms, that is, a victim of the persecution of Christians in Imperial Roman times. With the ban on Christianity lifted in 313AD, the cult of this bishop-martyr grew exponentially and St Januarius soon entered the heart of Naples, both figuratively and literally. His physical remains, which significantly included two glass vials with his blood, were held with affection by the Neapolitans. Not only was Januarius quickly promoted to the main patron saint of the city, but he was also believed to have interceded on the city’s behalf in times of war, pestilence, or Vesuvian eruptions.<sup>689</sup> The annual sign of the coagulated blood of the saint, melting as if by miracle in front of the eyes of the congregation, has since become the most popular devotional identifier of Naples. To this day, pilgrims and faithful from all over the world follow the exposition of the relics, invariably linking the miracle with good auspices for the year to come, that is until the miracle does not happen, and the blood remains solid. This leaves a sense of dread that the new year would bring some form of misfortune, which is exactly what happened on 16 December 2020, and again in March 2021.<sup>690</sup> Despite the Church affirming time and again that such signs should not be taken out of the pastoral context, perhaps it was too much to expect the Neapolitans to not see a connection with the pandemic.

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<sup>688</sup> Hills, Helen, ‘Introduction: Directions to Baroque Naples’, *Open Arts Journal*, Issue 6 (Winter 2017/8), 2-20.

<sup>689</sup> See: Russo, Carla, *Chiesa e Comunità nella Diocesi di Napoli tra Cinque e Settecento* (Napoli: Guida Ed., 1984).

<sup>690</sup> RAI News. url: <https://www.rainews.it/archivio-rainews/articoli/napoli-non-si-e-sciolto-il-sangue-di-San-Gennaro-358f2b77-6f1d-4aae-a7e3-9f4ee337c3f8.html>; accessed on 7/3/2023.

The blood of St Januarius serves as an example of a cult that still carries much of the same sentiment as it did four hundred years ago. The previous section concluded with movement and this section thus purposely takes up the discussion with Januarius' blood that was expected to move but did not. Yet while the last chapter discussed religious kineticism in the context of absent-presences, Part 2 will focus more on the creation of a documented presence. Through the study of the cult of saints, 'early modern Catholicism emerges not as the apex of dogmatism and intellectual repression, but rather as a big engine for promoting the importance of intellectual judgment in the process of embracing faith.'<sup>691</sup> One objective of this chapter is to attempt to navigate the hurdles and uncertainties that afflicted hagiographers and Church censors alike when writing about the supernatural, on the fringes of reason. There are, nonetheless, a few methodological difficulties. With cases like St Januarius, the historian has the luxury of an uninterrupted cult that is still strong and continues to shape the city's identity, making it easier to follow across time and space.<sup>692</sup> Other cults are more elusive since they may be less documented, less renowned, not so spectacular or virtually extinct; but they are no less important in understanding how devotion shapes communities and influences behaviour.<sup>693</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Hospitallers were keen devotees of the liquefaction of the blood of St John at San Gregorio Armeno. Such devotion was also present in Naples, but there is barely any memory of the Precursor's blood-miracle among the Neapolitans today.

The following chapters will look at cults of saints that the Order of St John celebrated in their headquarters in Malta in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through their efforts to document these Saints and their lives for posterity. Some of these saints were particular for the Order since the individuals celebrated had themselves been members. Others were saints of the universal church but with a particular connection to Malta. Most of these cults have since been forgotten, suppressed, or have lost most of their devotional meaning. The one exception to the above statement is the cult of St Paul, which was strongly ingrained in the

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<sup>691</sup> Tutino, Stefania, *The Many Faces of Credulitas* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2022), 3.

<sup>692</sup> On sacred space, see: De Silva, (ed.) *The Sacralization of Space and Behaviour*.

<sup>693</sup> Stefania Tutino gives two examples of Jesuit candidates for sainthood, Marcello Mastrilli and Giulio Mancinelli, who had cults in Naples and Florence respectively. They were the source of many disagreements and even censorships, but their memory gradually faded; Tutino (2022), 151-178.

island's devotional fabric long before the arrival of the knights, and to a certain extent is still present, especially in the districts of Mdina, Rabat, and Valletta. Though much of what was discussed in the previous chapters will also be present in the study of the cult of St Paul in Malta, namely the creation of devotional spaces, the manufacture of religious materiality, and the detailed ritual, the Pauline chapter looks outwards rather than inwards. The Verdalle magistracy already demonstrated signs of devotional circulation, at least among the Order's own peripheries. The ascension of Wignacourt to the magistracy at the dawn of the seventeenth century resulted in greater efforts being made at a universalising diffusion, with the Grotto of St Paul in Rabat presenting the best opportunity.

The following chapters will take the Order of St John as a case study in the culture of Counter-Reformation saints. To continue chronologically, we shall consider what was taking place towards the latter years of Wignacourt's magistracy until the election of Lascaris (ca.1618-36). This will serve a dual purpose: to understand the fabric of the Hospitaller vocation as presented through the hagiographies of their member saints, as well as the effects that introductions in the process of canonisations had on the Order's attempts to obtain universal recognition for its own saints. These individuals were less bound to the island's devotional identity and more reflective of the image that the Order wanted to project of itself and the moral exemplars that it wanted to present to its members. Although it is not possible to know the full effects of the Order's strategies in promoting saints for individual veneration, the next chapters will seek to give a glimpse into such issues as spiritual ambiguity and historical certainty, in relation to the Order's constant need to redefine itself.

Already by the sixteenth century, those communities that wanted to obtain recognition from Rome for the saints they already venerated, as well as possibly to have new ones confirmed, had to embark on an elaborate task: they had to put everything in writing, including accurate dates of birth and death, confirmed testimonies of miracles, and authentication of that individual's physical remains.<sup>694</sup> Even though hagiographies predated Trent by centuries, if previously their role was purely to foster devotions on a local level, now they had the added

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<sup>694</sup> See: Papa, Giovanni, *Le Cause di Canonizzazione nel primo periodo della Congregazione dei Riti (1588-1634)* (Roma: Urbaniana University Press, 2001).

purpose of providing Rome with proof to confirm a candidate for sanctity and subsequently give the go-ahead for the appropriate liturgy to be celebrated. These complicated checks and balances that the Church set up in order to avoid being further shamed for the choice of saints were largely part of a historical exercise rather than a theological one. In other words, the Church made extensive use of hagiographies (otherwise known as *Legenda* or *Vitae* in period sources) to confirm or suppress cults of saints in religious communities or cities (the ‘particular’). The centrality of history to the canonisation process was further strengthened over time.<sup>695</sup> It is essential, therefore, to give an overview of the history of canonisations, particularly the early seventeenth-century changes, to fully appreciate how monumental the Order’s task actually was of producing hagiographical works on Hospitaller saints. During this period, the Order of St John did not have a proper volume dedicated entirely to the hagiographies of those members it considered saints, so the historian Giacomo Bosio (1544-1627) was asked to explore its archives and extrapolate the necessary material to write one. This will provide a clearer connection between the work of an early modern historian, the endorsement of hagiographies by Rome, and the evolution of devotion within a particular community.

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<sup>695</sup> See: *Erudizione e devozione, Le Raccolte di Vite di santi in età moderna e contemporanea*, Giovanni Luongo (ed.) (Rome: Viella, 2000).

## Chapter 4 - The Grotto

*'Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness.'*<sup>696</sup>

Documenting saints' cults in the early modern period was an elaborate task. Whoever embarked on this enterprise had to have a network of people supplying him with information obtained from multiple archives and private correspondence. This chapter will look at how the Order formally took ownership of the cult of St Paul on the island of Malta at the start of the seventeenth century through three processes: controlling the narrative, physically occupying the places associated with that narrative, and obtaining a series of privileges from Rome that effectively alienated the local diocese. The second part of the chapter shall consider the methods the Order employed to disseminate the cult by means of the circulation of materiality obtained from the limestone cave. Much of the discussion will revolve around individuals who, in line with what was argued in the previous section, took their own initiative to promote models of sanctity and materiality for devotion for the benefit of the entire organisation.

When the Order of St John took formal possession of the islands of Malta, they were aware of several locations associated with the final journey of the apostle St Paul, in particular a grotto outside the old city of Mdina where he had been imprisoned for three months. The rock of this cave was believed to possess miraculous powers. Despite the many shrines and toponyms<sup>697</sup> that traditionally recalled the passage of St Paul, the claim that Malta was the location of the shipwreck of the apostle Paul on his way to his trial in Rome had been a point of contention for centuries. The Acts of the Apostles mention an island by the name of *Melite*, and as early as the fifteenth century some biblical scholars challenged Malta's claim to being the gospel's *Melite*. To take just one of many examples, in 1480 the traveller and scholar Felix Fabri claimed that the *Melite* mentioned in the Acts was the Greek island of Mytelena

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<sup>696</sup> Acts 28, 1-2.

<sup>697</sup> Such as *San Pawl Milqj*, *San Pawl il-Baħar* (*Cala di San Paolo* or *San Paolo a Mare*), *Ras ir-Raħeb*, *Għajn Rażul*, and *il-Pwales*.

(modern-day Lesbos).<sup>698</sup> Such theories did not deter visitors and pilgrims from stating in their travelogues that they visited the Grotto where St Paul had resided in Malta, proof of which were the miraculous stone chippings which seemed to confirm the Maltese narrative.

These healing properties that the powder from the Grotto allegedly possessed soon became an international sensation. Up until the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Grotto was a location for early religious tourism, pilgrims or just curious travellers, on an otherwise un-imposing island. For the inhabitants of the island, however, tracing the Christian roots to St Paul provided a spiritual driving force, some sort of guarantee that the Apostle would not abandon the island when it was raided by Muslims or afflicted by pestilence. This intervention by St Paul on behalf of his island was believed to be more than a mere shower of grace. One case in point recounts the physical appearance of the saint on horseback brandishing a dagger to ward off a Muslim army that besieged Mdina in 1429.<sup>699</sup> A late seventeenth-century painting by the artist-knight Mattia Preti immortalising this episode still hangs in St Paul's Cathedral in Mdina.<sup>700</sup> (Fig.33) The story of St Paul *Matamoros* is uncannily similar to the Reconquista equivalent of St James in Spain, especially the iconography that depicts the saint on a white horse, dressed in a sky-blue tunic adorned with stars.

The story is not even unique to Malta, as similar traditions place other saints as heroes of timely interventions against overwhelming odds, making it hard for the historian to assess whether these narratives were the consequence of devotion or a catalyst for it. Writing in 1602 about a similar event that had occurred in Mdina in 1551, Giacomo Bosio displayed a healthy dose of scholarly caution that was more indicative of his times than of the period contemporary to the event. We shall return to this point in the next chapter and discuss in more detail the problem of writing about the supernatural in the seventeenth century. The

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<sup>698</sup> Freller, Thomas, *St Paul's Grotto and its visitors – pilgrims, knights, scholars and sceptics* (Malta: Valletta Publishing Promotions, 1996), 56-58.

<sup>699</sup> Anthony Luttrell says that the miracle was related to another invasion in 1470: Luttrell, Anthony, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and invention in Maltese Historiography', *Melita Historica*, 7(2), 119.

<sup>700</sup> Donated by Don Antonio Testaferrata who commissioned the work, completed in 1688: Sciberras, Keith, *Mattia Preti Life and Works* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2020), 219.





Figure 30: Altar of St Agatha with marble statue from the siege of 1551 (first half of the sixteenth century), Church of St Agatha, Rabat-Malta



Figure 31: Mattia Preti, *St Paul vanquishing the Moors* (1681), Metropolitan Cathedral, Mdina.

story unfolds in Mdina, under siege by an army of Muslim corsairs under the leadership of Sinan Pasha and Torgut Reis.<sup>701</sup> Bosio recounted how a nun had claimed to have a vision from God, telling her that if the statue of St Agatha<sup>702</sup> from Rabat was placed on the ramparts, no harm would befall the city. (Fig. 30) The information was relayed to the knight captain of the city, who on that occasion was accompanied by a number of other knights and noblemen from Mdina, and the exact words that Bosio used were: *'For the encouragement and devotion of the people, it was decided to do as the nun had recounted'*.<sup>703</sup> Bosio was not too convinced that this was of any consequence, yet he wrote that on the dawn of Monday 20 July 1551, the statue was carried

<sup>701</sup> They/Pasha/Reis would be killed in Malta during the siege of 1565.

<sup>702</sup> The statue is still standing in the homonymous church in Rabat, on top of the catacombs that carry the same name. A cartouche next to the statue recounts the role of the statue in the events of 1551. The church was embellished by Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner, and his coat of arms are visible above the statue.

<sup>703</sup> *'...per edificazione, e soddistazione del devoto popolo, far si dovesse quanto la Monaca ricordato haveva.'*; Bosio III, 300.

in solemn procession followed by a pontifical mass led by the bishop. Later that day, the Muslim army encircled the city. Bosio, after having given a detailed account of the manoeuvres of the next few days, then writes that the enemy unexpectedly lifted the siege. Many attributed this surprising retreat to the intercession of St Agatha, however, Bosio was again very cautious, noting only two things. First, he wrote that despite the statue being in clear view of the enemy and their efforts, no damage was done to the statue.<sup>704</sup> Secondly, he added that many other fascinating stories were told by the jubilant people who firmly believed that it was St Agatha who saved them, however ‘...since they are not approved miracles, nor worthy of history, we will remain silent about them.’<sup>705</sup> This did not deter the population from declaring St Agatha co-patron of the islands along with St Paul.

### ***Stumbling on a miracle***

Perhaps it would be a mistake to imagine a saint’s cult as having a linear growth, starting with the introduction of the cult and growing exponentially as prodigies take place. At least in the case of St Paul, the development of the cult was far from linear or predictable, but rather experienced ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ without ever being completely side-lined. However, depending on the group of people that is being studied, and in comparison to the cults of other saints on the island, its importance somewhat shifted in importance. In 1549, archpriest and curate of the Grotto Matteo Surdu complained that despite the ancient tradition and importance to Maltese spiritual identity, the place had been abandoned for the last century by the Maltese, to the point that the small church atop the Grotto was in ruins.<sup>706</sup> The cult of St Paul had to face clear ‘competition’ which the cult of St Paul with the arrival of the mendicant orders and subsequently the Order of St John, with the myriad of saints that they brought with them. Yet what ensured the survival of the Pauline cult and eventually enabled its resurgence was that, unlike all the others, it was not only felt but could be seen and touched. In this case, it was even possible for a pilgrim to take a piece of that saintly shrine home with him, as a souvenir of sorts, yet one imbued with the same power as the Grotto itself. It was even believed that

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<sup>704</sup> Bosio III, 301.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>706</sup> Luttrell, ‘Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela’, 114.

despite the many chippings that were taken by thousands of visitors, the cave had not grown an inch. This was an essential aspect of the narrative that sought to convince pilgrims that the space had miraculously remained unaltered across centuries, as if St Paul wanted to build a connection with the individual pilgrim by means of their sense of space. One of the main motivations for pilgrims visiting such holy places was the opportunity to visualise a narrative within a physical context, which becomes harder to do if that space is considerably altered. Yet it was to be expected that a place that had attracted patrons for centuries present itself somewhat differently from what the saint would have experienced, for the simple reason that pilgrims do not only seek to take something from the shrine but also leave their mark behind.



*Figure 32: St Paul's Grotto, Rabat-Malta [Courtesy – Wignacourt Museum – Rabat]*

'Leaving their mark' for an institution like the Order of St John meant nothing less than a substantial artistic patronage. This resulted in the transformation of a simple unassuming cave that blended seamlessly with the countryside to an imposing structure that stood out, complete with adjoining facilities and several other off-site endowments that ensured a



steady income to cover the costs.<sup>707</sup> While the Grotto was the epicentre of the Pauline cult, it was by no means the only place with a direct association to the devotion towards the saint.



Figure 33: Frontispieces of the 1705 Cabreo of the Grotto of St Paul, AOM Treas. B 305

One other major site was the very place where it was thought that St Paul stood by the fire and was bitten by the snake. Here, the knights found a medieval chapel, which was reported by Jean Quintin d'Autun in 1533<sup>708</sup> and eventually rebuilt by Grand Master Wignacourt in 1610.<sup>709</sup> It was a sort of déjà vu for the Order to come into possession of an island that had a connection to St Paul. Right next to the castle of Lindos in Rhodes, there still is a St Paul's Bay, which had a chapel where, according to tradition, the saint had spent some time preaching around the year 57CE, though the Acts of the Apostles mention only those names of Rhodes and Kos<sup>710</sup> and gives no other details.<sup>711</sup>

<sup>707</sup> On the construction of the Churches of St Paul and St Publius, the Collegium for Conventual Chaplains, and sponsorships by knights and Maltese patrons, see: Azzopardi, John (ed.), *St Paul's Grotto, Church and Museum* (Malta: Progress Press, 1990).

<sup>708</sup> Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela', 114.

<sup>709</sup> Dal Pozzo I (1703), 458.

<sup>710</sup> Another of the Order's possessions in the Dodecanese.

<sup>711</sup> Acts-21:1

An early eighteenth-century *cabreo* documents the development of the relationship between the Grotto and the Order over the preceding hundred years.<sup>712</sup> Commissioned by Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Rocaful (1697-1720), *cabreo* (Fig.33) was a notarial document that was commonplace for most landowning institutions in early modern Europe, yet this one is somewhat different from others that the Order possessed for its other territories outside the *Convento*. This was because a good part of it was dedicated to the resurgence of the Pauline cult under the Hospitaller administration. One could even argue that the *cabreo* was the final step in a prolonged appropriation of what had been an exclusively a Diocesan cult under the tutelage of the Mdina Cathedral Chapter.

The importance that is given to the early seventeenth-century resurgence, including which narratives were chosen to build the *cabreo* around, is perhaps the best example that exists in terms of a Hospitaller sacred landscape built around a combination of location, object, and ritual. One might think that drawing a report on these Pauline sites was merely an exercise in inventory-keeping, but such an approach would disregard the indelible connection between patronage and devotion. Evidence of this is that the volume does not only document the physical structures and spaces but also attempts to demonstrate how these places came into existence by giving an account of the development of the cult. The Order had to face the problem that it had no reliable, detailed sources of information on the development of the cult of St Paul before 1530, with most information relating to events that took place during Wignacourt's magistracy almost a century later.

In contrast, by 1705 when the *Cabreo* was being drawn, the fame of the miraculous powder commonly referred to as *Terra Sigillata Melitensis*, had contributed to a drastic increase in printed material throughout the seventeenth century that associated St Paul with Malta. Aside from pamphlets specifically dedicated to the properties and use of *Terra Sigillata*, no travelogue or general description of Malta failed to mention the importance of the famed Grotto. Nevertheless, most of these works were produced by individuals who only mentioned the Grotto in passing, and are usually descriptive in nature, generally lacking the type of information that the Order was seeking on the cult itself. The majority repeated or quoted

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<sup>712</sup> A.O.M., Treasury B, 305 *Cabrevationum Volumen*.

from each other. The information that the knights needed was twofold: the cult's antiquity and the Hospitaller's contribution to its dissemination.

The Order's first contact with St Paul's Grotto in documentary evidence came a few months before Grand Master Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam took formal possession of the island. A small retinue, including the French chaplain Quintin, sailed to Malta to pave the way for the rest of the Order. As many others before him had done, Quintin, who happened to be a keen traveller, kept a diary of his journey, eventually publishing it in Lyon in 1536 under the title *Insulae Melitae Descriptio*.<sup>713</sup> He could not fail to mention that the island that was going to be the new home of the Order had also welcomed the great apostle of the Gentiles, drawing immediate attention to the maritime element in St Paul's misadventure that led him to Malta, as if drawing a parallel with the Order's recent travails across the Mediterranean in search of a new home.<sup>714</sup>

*'In this way the Maltese sailors include Paul in the history of their land: above all they point at and venerate his footsteps in many places. The shore of that place, which is between two seas, can actually be visited (according to Ptolemy it is called Chersonesos, as indeed it is); it has from very ancient times derived its name from Paul inasmuch as it is the site of the shipwreck. There is a small chapel in stone, not the least venerated in the island. Near the city there is a cave dug in a rock, with two altars within; they say Paul was held in custody in it for three months along with the other prisoners, healing at the same time the islanders who were vexed with various kinds of illnesses and diseases and calling them to Christ by his preaching.'*<sup>715</sup>

Despite the apparent connection, it does not seem like the Order capitalised on the presence of this important site straight away. All the while, the presence of the Order on the island aided the visibility of the Grotto, as some knights and guests of the Order on the island visited

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<sup>713</sup> Quintin d'Autun, Jean, *Insulae Melitae Descriptio* (Lyons: 1536).

<sup>714</sup> The Order lost Rhodes at the end of 1521. Its journey from Rhodes to Messina, Civitavecchia, Viterbo, and Villefranche is somewhat evocative of one of Paul's journeys. Much of the years between the departure from Rhodes and the arrival in Malta were spent at sea, with the Order attempting to reorganise itself while weathering various plague outbreaks and the destruction that the the Habsburg-Valois war brought to Italy.

<sup>715</sup> Vella, Horatio, *The earliest description of Malta (Lyons 1536) Jean Quintin d'Autun. Translation and Notes* (Malta: 1980); Freller (1996), 72.

and wrote about it, and already by the mid-sixteenth century, it was fairly well-known internationally.<sup>716</sup> Along with the healing grotto powder, most of these sources also mentioned the '*glossopetrae*', fossilised shark teeth that were thought to be evocative of the tongue of the snake that bit St Paul on his arrival.<sup>717</sup> St Paul should have died by the serpent's poison but instead brushed the reptile off into the fire. It was thus traditionally believed that in so doing he made all the other snakes on the island innocuous. Like the Grotto powder, the fossilised teeth were believed to have thaumaturgical powers.<sup>718</sup> The high demand for the powdered stone is mentioned in one of the book in most demand in the Holy Roman Empire, Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographie* (Basel, 1569).<sup>719</sup> Although he never visited the island himself, Münster reproduced a map of the island and reported that the Grotto lay beneath a small chapel and was composed of two rooms, indicating the renown that the place had gained even in places so far away.<sup>720</sup> Closer to Malta, Tommaso Fazello's *Siculi or praedicatorum de rebus Siculis decades duae*,<sup>721</sup> published in Palermo in 1558 and Tommaso Porcacchi's 1572 *L'Isule piu famose al mondo*, both mention the *Terra di San Paolo* in connection to the site itself. Porcacchi also emphasised the exportation of the cult to Italy by means of the diffusion of stones from the Grotto which he called 'the grace of St Paul': an antidote to snake bites and scorpion poison.<sup>722</sup>

What these sources have in common is that although they helped disseminate devotion towards the saint and his 'graces', none of them were written exclusively with the devotee in mind. They could be consulted by pilgrims seeking to undertake a journey, but they were generally intended to serve as descriptions that satisfied the academic curiosities of intellectuals. They deal with *historia sacra* tangentially, but they cannot be considered as exponents of this genre in themselves. A second observation is that even in the years before

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<sup>716</sup> Freller, Thomas, *St Paul's Grotto and its Visitors: Pilgrims, knights, scholars and sceptics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malta: Valletta Publishing, 1996).

<sup>717</sup> On the scientific interest in glossopetrae, see: Hsu, Kuang-Tai, 'The Path to Steno's synthesis on the animal origin of glossopetrae' in *The Revolution in Geology from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* G. Rosenberg (ed.), The Geological Society of America Memoir 203 (2009), 93-106.

<sup>718</sup> See; Zammit Maempel, George, *Seals of Medicinal Terra Sigillata Melitensis And Pauline Traditions In Malta* (Malta: 2010).

<sup>719</sup> On Münster, see: McLean, Matthew, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster, Describing the World in the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>720</sup> Freller (1996), 74; Münster, Sebastian, *Cosmographie* Vol. II, CCCLXIII (Basel: 1569).

<sup>721</sup> Translated into Italian: Fazello, Tommaso, *Dell'Historia di Sicilia* (Venice: 1573), 15.

<sup>722</sup> Porcacchi, Tommaso, *L'Isule piu famose del Mondo* (Padova: 1620), Libro I, 59.6 ; Freller (1996), 76.

the Order took formal possession of the site, the fame of the Grotto was largely a result of the fame of the *Terra di San Paolo*. This already highlights the interdependence of narrative-space-object that I will analyse more in depth throughout this chapter. When travellers and biblical scholars challenged the interpretation of St Paul's shipwreck narrative or the exact place where it took place, the entire cult risked being dismantled, but similarly, the cult was at risk when doubts were cast on the miracles that the Grotto powder produced, or its rightful provenance.

In 1571, the Cremonese visitor Tommaso de Bastiano asked the Civil Courts of Malta to provide him with a written patent that testified that the powder he obtained from the cave was indeed authentic, not being satisfied by the one provided by the administrators of the crypt.

*'We hereby testify and in undeniable truth attest that Tommaso di Bastiano of Cremona, son-in-law of Master Paolo di Giovanni from Lecce and living in Pisa, as he stated to be so named and surnamed, who is at present here in Malta, out of devotion, has been in the church or crypt of glorious Saint Paul situated near Notabile, the city of Malta, and has therefrom taken a certain amount of earth from the said crypt, as attested by the Archpriest or Rector of the same church, from which crypt an infinite number of people who have been here in Malta continuously take out of great devotion and subsequently daily experience shows [its effectiveness] against bites of vipers and other venomous and deadly animals of whatever species, from which stone many others replenish their devotion. Furthermore, we attest how in the whole of islands of Malta and of Gozzo [there is] no species of venomous animals and that those outside Malta, coming here, lose their pristine and deadly virtues, and their bite does not kill but heals without [the need] of any remedies, save the great and divine power through the intercession of the glorious Apostle Saint Paul.'*<sup>723</sup>

The concern about the *Terra di S. Paolo's* authenticity reflected the rampant trade of fake sacramentals and relics which was one of the main medieval abuses that the Counter-

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<sup>723</sup> Magna Curia Castellania, Registrum Actorum Originalium, Vol. 15 (1570-72), 26 March 1571; Translation by Zammit Maempel, George, 'Rock from St Paul's Grotto in Medicine and Folklore' in Azzopardi (ed.), *St Paul's Grotto; Church and Museum at Rabat, Malta* (Malta: Wignacourt Museum, 1990), 215; Freller (1996), 77-78.



Reformation Church sought to address.<sup>724</sup> The Order seems to have had difficulty in finding a solution to eradicate abuses, especially with something so easily accessible as limestone chippings. The Protestant adventurer Michael Herber von Bretten who was in Malta twice in 1585 and 1588 erroneously attributed the miraculous powers of the *Terra di San Paolo* to limestone gathered from any location on the island.<sup>725</sup> However, Stefano Mercuri's proposal that the Grand Master should put a seal on authentically obtained Grotto chippings confirms that not any Maltese limestone would suffice. Mercuri took inspiration from a custom adopted by the Ottoman Sultan to mark the earth of Armenia and Lesbos which were believed to possess similar powers to the Maltese stone.<sup>726</sup> By then (1645), it had become common practice to crush the chippings into powder to make a slurry, that would then be remoulded into intricate medallions featuring a relief of St Paul, images of serpents and scorpions, or any other saint of their choosing. The addition of a mark or seal (*sigillum*) of authenticity is why these chippings were often referred to as *Terra Sigillata Melitensis* (TSM)<sup>727</sup> though the inconsistencies in the name remain in sources throughout the seventeenth century. While some were more concerned that without the seal or a certificate of authenticity, the *Terra di San Paolo* could be easily counterfeited, others, such as the sixteenth-century doctor Andrea Matthioli expressed their scepticism even of the miraculous powers of the authentically obtained chippings.<sup>728</sup>

The Grotto of St Paul had been administered by ecclesiastical authorities at least since the fifteenth century, and Bastiano's request to the civil court is a testament to the fact that these courts issued some form of document to the pilgrims who requested it. But there does not seem to be any written endorsement of the traditions or miracles from a Church entity or representative before 1575 when the Apostolic Visitor Pietro Dusina was invited to Malta. The Dusina visit can be considered the first major attempt to bring the Maltese Church in

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<sup>724</sup> For a case study, see: Olds, Katrina, 'The Ambiguities of the Holy: Authenticating Relics in Seventeenth-Century Spain', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 65, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 135-184.

<sup>725</sup> Freller, Thomas, *The life and Adventures of Michael Herberer von Bretten* (Malta: Valletta Publishing, 1997); Heberer Von Bretten, Michael, *Aegyptiaca Servitus* (Heidelberg: 1610).

<sup>726</sup> Mercuri, Stefano, *De gli errori popolari d'Italia* (Venora: 1645), 280-281.

<sup>727</sup> *Sigillata* from *Sigillum*, the seal of authenticity.

<sup>728</sup> Matthioli, Andrea, *Petri Andrae Matthioli Medici senesis commentarii, in Libros sex...*(Venice: 1554), 694; Freller (1996), 77.

conformity with the Tridentine maxims.<sup>729</sup> This included the meticulous task of visiting each church, chapel or shrine with the intent of determining whether they were adequate for liturgical ritual or fell short of what were deemed minimum requirements of any Catholic sacred space. These requirements included the provision of an altar, apertures to lock the place, sacred vessels and vestments for the celebration of mass with adequate storage, as well as a sound structure, with good flooring and roofing. Dusina drew up a description of each of the places he visited, listing the dedication of each and nearby features that would help locate it, grouping them by nearest village or city (which is probably how he was taken to see them).<sup>730</sup>

He was sent to Malta following a request made by Grand Master La Cassiere to Rome, to act as a mediator in one of many spats between the Bishop and the Grand Master.<sup>731</sup> It is not clear who drew up Dusina's itinerary, which included Diocesan, Hospitaller, as well as private churches and chapels, but what is certain is that he went to the remotest of places and it is not believed that any of the existing churches at the time were omitted. We also have his written description of St Paul's Grotto, with Dusina confirming that this was indeed the place where the saint had resided and preached, as well as embracing the tradition surrounding the healing powers of the stone chippings. Although the Dusina report is more descriptive in nature than, say Münster, Fazello, or Porcacchi, since it goes into the meticulous detail of listing doors, windows, and flooring, the intention of this source is clearly distinct. As the Pope's representative and later Inquisitor and Nuncio of Malta, Dusina's contribution represents the first connection between a written testimony and liturgical practice. In many ways, for the Pauline cult, the project that Dusina started in 1575 reached its culmination with the 1705 *Cabreo*.

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<sup>729</sup> For the Order's participation at Trent, see: Ranghoni Machiavelli, Luigi, 'Il Contributo degli Ordini Religiosi al Concilio di Trento', Cherubello (ed.), *Studio Teologico Per Laici* (Firenze: Vallecchi Ed., 1946), 363-378; On religious Orders and conforming to Trent see Giannini, Massimo Carlo, *Papacy, Religious Orders and International Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Rome: Viella, 2013); For Malta conforming to Trent see Bonnici, Alexander, 'I Vescovi di Malta Baldassare Cagliares e Michele Balaguer..', *Melita Historica* 5 (2), 1969, 114-157.; Cassar, Carmel, 'The reformation and sixteenth-century Malta', *Melita Historica*, 10(1), 1988, 51-68.

<sup>730</sup> There are many copies of the Dusina report. For a modern transcription and detailed study of the extant copies, see: *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part IV Documents at the Vatican*, Aquilina and Fiorini (eds.) (Malta: Malta University P., 2001).

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii-xx.

### ***The Morisco***

What had changed in the years between the 1575 report and the 1705 *Cabreo* was that the Order of St John had taken formal possession of the Grotto thanks to the tireless efforts of an unlikely patron of Morisco origin who desperately wanted to become a Hospitaller: Juan Benegas?. The narrative of how the Order came to gain possession of the Grotto had to be sustained with appropriate documentation if Grand Master Perellos was to prove beyond any doubt that the Order had been central in the resurgence and exportation of the cult. Naturally, all this was relative, as one could argue that the travelogues and foreign publications proved that the fame of the Grotto and the *Terra di San Paolo* was long established when the Order took formal possession of the site. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that throughout the seventeenth century, there was a renewed vigour of the cult of Saint Paul that resulted in a showering of both spiritual and temporal gifts, ultimately contributing to the change even manifesting itself physically in the layout of the sacred space or spaces that surrounded the Grotto.

This balance between a tradition that preceded the Order and a renewed interest that resulted from Counter-Reformation Catholic zeal is perhaps best described by Marc'Antonio Haxiac's *Relatione della nuova e grandissima Divozione introdotta nella Sacra Grotta di S. Paolo nell'Isola di Malta*. This manuscript from 1610, parts of which were copied almost verbatim in the first few pages of the *Cabreo* of 1705,<sup>732</sup> was the first attempt at a sacred historical reading of the Maltese landscape in the years after the Council of Trent. Unfortunately, little is known about Haxiac's motivations for writing the *Relatione*, except for the fact that he was probably from Mdina and was therefore connected to the Grotto due to the geographical proximity. Haxiac's biography remains a desideratum and what we do know about him is mostly derived from what he himself wrote in the *Relatione*. He was certainly a surgeon on the Order's galleys. The *Relatione* attests to two crucial acquaintances of Haxiac's,

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<sup>732</sup> Azzopardi, John and Blondy, Alain, *Marc'Antonio Haxiac and Malta's Devotion to St Paul* (Valletta: Fondation de Malte, 2012), 15-16.

which in part explains why this work was considered so important that the Order decided to copy relevant parts from it a century later.

The first of these acquaintances is listed in the dedication itself. Haxiac's eye-witness testimony of the 'new and great devotion' stops in 1610, yet after thirteen years and still in manuscript form, he sent it to Cardinal Fabrizio Veralli (1566-1624) (*Fig.34*) in Rome. The original copy sent to Veralli has not been traced, but at least five copies have been identified by Alain Blondy and Mgr. John Azzopardi.



*Figure 34: Tomb of Cardinal Fabrizio Veralli, Chiesa di S. Agostino - Rome*

If one accepts these copies as being true to the original, then it seems Haxiac sent Veralli an incomplete account.<sup>733</sup> Much had happened to St Paul's Grotto in those thirteen years that

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<sup>733</sup> Azzopardi, Blondy, 17.

Haxiac omitted, namely the separation of the Grotto from the adjoining diocesan parish and its bequest to the Order. Alain Blondy has put forward a theory as to why Haxiac, a close collaborator and employee of the knights, decided to leave out this crucial detail along with other invaluable information. Cardinal Veralli had served as an Inquisitor of Malta between 1600 and 1605 and during his residence on the island, he could have visited the Grotto. Haxiac must have known this, and possibly even accompanied him on some of these visits. In 1623, a conclave was set to take place in Rome to elect the successor of Gregory XV Ludovisi. Veralli was not only going to be present as a Cardinal elector but was also widely believed to be one of the favourite candidates to ascend the throne of Peter since he had the backing of the powerful *Borghesiani* faction.<sup>734</sup> Blondy argued that Haxiac was familiar with conclave politics and sought to make an impression on Veralli, in the hope of obtaining the patronage of a soon-to-be Pope. It was not to be as Maffeo Barberini was elected Pope Urban VIII at that conclave. If Blondy is correct, however, it would explain why the *Relazione* is incomplete. Haxiac could have started working on the *Relazione* before the death of Gregory XV, and although it was not yet complete, he still felt it was good enough to send to Veralli, with the dedication thus being an afterthought. Following Veralli's unsuccessful bid to the papacy and his death a few months later, Haxiac seems to have lost interest in the enterprise and there was no follow-up to extend the *Relazione* beyond 1610. Nonetheless, this treatise became a core reading on the evolution of the Pauline cult in Malta. It was quoted by the Order in the *Cabreo* a century later, not to mention by other erudite scholars such as Dal Pozzo (1703), Gio Antonio Ciantar (*Dissertationes Apologeticae*, 1738), Bonaventura Attardi (*Bilancia della Verita*, 1738), and Ignazio Savero Mifsud (*Biblioteca Maltese*, 1764).

A second individual that is more intricately tied to Haxiac's narrative is the Spanish Morisco who wanted to join the Order, Juan Benegas (Venegas, Benegos) de Cordoba. (*Fig.35*) Haxiac was the first to document the story of how Benegas came to settle in Malta and what his connection was with the Pauline cult, with there being little doubt that the two knew each

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<sup>734</sup> The Cardinals who had been nominated by Paul V in opposition to the *Ludovisiani*, a faction that had supported the election of Gregory XV two years prior.



Figure 35: Juan Benegas de Cordoba (Courtesy - Wignacourt Museum, Rabat)

other. Juan Benegas came to Malta in 1599 and asked to live in St Paul's Grotto as a hermit.<sup>735</sup> It was Benegas who wrote to the Pope to ask for the rectorate of the Grotto, and subsequently for it to be made distinct and autonomous from the church of St Paul; a request which was confirmed by Paul V in 1607. From this point on, Juan Benegas adopted the name Giovanni della S. Grotta di Paolo. In simple terms, he had come from nowhere to become the administrator of the most important shrine of the island, somehow circumventing the Diocese and Mdina Cathedral Chapter as well as the Augustinians who had a convent nearby and for almost two centuries had assisted in the liturgical services at the Grotto. Benegas' substantial feat was assisted by the Order's networks, particularly a possible intervention by Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of the Pope.<sup>736</sup> It is not surprising that soon after, Benegas made

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<sup>735</sup> Thomas Freller is not convinced that Juan Benegas resided day and night in the damp cave, citing the absence of any mention of this in any of the travelogues or descriptions, including from Spanish visitors. In a 1615 letter to Pope Paul V, Benegas says that he was living in a house with two rooms, an oratory, and a garden: Freller (1996), 100.

<sup>736</sup> Like Haxiac, Fra Carlo Lombardo erroneously stated that Paul V accepted Benegas' plea as he had served as an Inquisitor of Malta before he was elected pope. Lombardo's Operetta '*Brevi Notizie della Venuta del Glorioso Apostolo S. Paolo*', (undated eighteenth century, dedicated to Grand Master Vilhena) also quotes extensively from Haxiac. It was Fabrizio Veralli, the recipient of Haxiac's manuscript that had served as Inquisitor. The manuscript by Fra Lombardo was part of Ignazio Saverio Mifsud's '*Stromata Melitense*' documents: N.L.M., MS2.



a request to be able to bequeath the administration of the shrine to the Grand Master *pro tempore* in perpetuity, and it is even less surprising that by the time the affirmative answer reached Malta, Benegas had been invested as a member of the Order. A contemporary portrait of the Fra Juan Benegas shows him wearing a hermit's tunic,<sup>737</sup> a large medallion with the image of St Paul on his chest and the black cape of the Order with the white eight-pointed cross. This portrait is a succinct reminder of how Benegas became the embodiment of the Order, literally putting its seal on the cult of St Paul in Malta.

Benegas' contribution to the Grotto is also centred around the concepts of object and ritual, as Haxiac's narrative recounts. In the first few years of residence, Benegas had simply sought to keep the place in a good enough state as would be befitting the celebration of Mass. Compared to other places on the island that had a relationship with St Paul, Haxiac wrote that the Grotto was the very place where St Paul erected the first altar and celebrated the very first mass. In other words, the Grotto was the island's first church and with the celebration of

*Figure 36: Reliquary Pectoral Cross, gift from Pope Paul V to Juan Benegas (Courtesy - Wignacourt Museum, Rabat)*



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<sup>737</sup> According to Haxiac, Benegas had obtained this tunic made of rough wool from a beggar with whom he had exchanged his clothes, much like a modern St Francis (and countless other saints).

mass on what Haxiac believed to be the same altar, Benegas was re-enacting the birth of the Church in Malta. Furthermore, Haxiac stated that it was that first altar that eventually led the Maltese to destroy their pagan temples and fill the islands with countless Christian churches. Although archaeology in Malta has sustained in some cases the theory of transformation of pagan temples into Christian churches, Haxiaq's statement is made to fit the narrative of an uninterrupted Catholic tradition that has a single point of origin which transformed the landscape into a Christian one. Furthermore, the element of continuity is enforced through the ancillary cult of St Publius, the Roman governor of the island who converted to Christianity after St Paul healed his father and was anointed the first bishop of the island.

Marc' Antonio Haxiac dedicated most of his work to describing what he clearly believed to be Benegas' greatest contribution. He wrote that after several years of taking care of the ritualistic continuity inside the Grotto, he decided to embark on a journey to Rome to meet the Pope. Haxiaq wrote that Pope Paul V received Benegas favourably since he had been an Inquisitor in Malta prior to being elected to the pontificate and had the occasion to visit the Grotto. This is a strange assertion since Camillo Borghese (Paul V) had never been an Inquisitor of Malta and it is therefore odd that Haxiaq, who in other cases seems to be so well informed on ecclesiastical matters makes such a noticeable mistake. More important to this study is that Benegas obtained several papal indulgences for the Grotto along with some important relics. The list includes a gold cross containing a shard of the True Cross, as well as the relics of saints Peter, Paul, Lawrence, and Anacletus. (Fig.36) From the Marquis de Villena, the Spanish Ambassador for Rome, Benegas obtained a few more relics which Haxiac lists meticulously one by one, stressing that each had the appropriate documents of authenticity.<sup>738</sup> The list of gifts from the Marquis Villena includes a considerable number of Roman martyrs. The list is an interesting example of how Rome was not only centralising cults by giving the Pope the tools to strengthen devotion but was also exporting cults through its many agents who amongst other things, gifted relics of Roman martyrs. Benegas was allowed to translate the relics to any church of his choosing, which is why his whole journey was documented by Haxiac as a form of *translatio*. The centre stage in the narrative is suddenly

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<sup>738</sup> Another piece of the True Cross, other relics of St Peter and St Paul, St John the Baptist, St Andrew, St Bartholemew, St Matthew, St Biagius, St Agatha, St Cecilia, St Pius martyr, St Flavianus, St Ciriacus, St Firmus, St Urban martyr, St Sulpitius, St Donatus, St Silvan, St Vittorius, St Gaudentius, St Anastasia, and St Mautilla.



occupied by these very precious objects that Benegas was carrying, as Haxiac wanted to prove that the bones that were (and still are) venerated in the Rabat Grotto, were the very same ones discovered in the Roman catacombs.

Benegas stopped in Naples where he had reliquaries manufactured. He chose to commission anthropomorphic ones, that is, polychromatic statues or busts made of wood with a *theca* embedded. These types of reliquaries were clearly less ostentatious than gold or silver monstrances but they helped the pilgrim identify and visualise better the saint. This was particularly the case for saints who were less known outside Rome, with the reliquary also assuming the function of a holy image. The Gozo relic of St Ursula is a very similar example from the same time period, most probably also the work of Neapolitan artists. As if the spiritual benefits of such an array of saints were not enough, in Naples, Benegas solicited the donation of a miraculous relief of the Virgin Mary, as well. Whilst being a host in the house of the lieutenant governor of the city, Leonora, he asked his host's wife, Donna, to see the miraculous image they had brought with them from Ciudad Rodrigo in Castille and then proceeded to ask for it as a gift. Donna was reluctant to part with an item that had been the source of much devotion in Castille and Naples, but Benegas convinced her that she would certainly benefit from the benefits of the many miracles it was yet to accomplish in Malta. It is clear that by this point, Benegas was not relying solely on the miraculous attributes of the Grotto itself but wanted to somehow enhance it with other sacred items.

The relics were brought to Malta on the Order's galleys and ceremoniously taken to the Conventual Church of St John's in Valletta while an adequate space was being prepared for them in Rabat. The Order's early involvement in the reorganisation of the Grotto, long before they formally took possession of the space, is a direct consequence of Benegas' desire to become a member. In the study of the development of cults, tracing the primary mover is an essential step in understanding how devotional communities are formed. If Benegas is an answer to the 'who?', the 'why?' or 'why now?' questions can be answered by assessing the spiritual utility that one individual's patronage had over the rest of the community.

In yet another demonstration of the interdependence of holy objects with ritual and space, the procession passed through several major villages along the fifteen-kilometre-long route,

lasting a couple of days. The villagers showed their joy and devotion by erecting triumphal arches and mock architectural features, generally full of religious symbolism, that represented a formal entry point to a city or village.<sup>739</sup> Halfway through it stopped in the village of Attard, where an altar had been erected for public veneration, ornate with many lights and rich drapery. The ceremonies attracted a crowd as large as 20,000 according to Haxiac, and he made it a point to mention how emotionally charged the procession was: people walking barefoot, carrying statues of St Paul and St Luke on their bare shoulders, while the prayers and singing moved some to tears. The ritual was attempting to emulate a return of St Paul to the island.

The very landscape of Malta was being blessed by the passage of the relics, which is why the procession was presided over by both the Grand Master and the Bishop, and the ritual was very precise and not without its fair share of disagreements. This is how Haxiac explained the squabbles that arose over religious jurisdiction and precedence:

*'...the enemy Satan had to try and use all his power to disrupt such a great deed, so he created an adversity between the Chapter and prelates of the Cathedral Church [of Mdina] and the Veneranda Assembla [of Conventual Chaplains of the Order] over the matter of primacy of place and precedence; Nevertheless, due to this, the glory of St Paul and St Luke was doubled, when instead of one procession we did two...'*<sup>740</sup>

By blaming *'l'inimico Satanasso'*, Haxiac seems to downplay the extent of these disagreements.<sup>741</sup> It must be said that such litigations were commonplace in ceremonies and rituals of the early modern period, both religious and secular, which explains why so much importance was given to protocol. Nevertheless, this case merits specific attention since at the root of the disagreement was the struggle for control over the Pauline cult. Haxiac and the *Cabreo* do not record the full extent of the litigation, but it was serious enough for the

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<sup>739</sup> A[rchivium] C[athedralis] M[elitensis] – 32B Miscellanea, Vol 10, 174; Testimony of Don Jacobu Xicluna over the matter of the Translation of Relics 1609.

<sup>740</sup> ACM 32 B, Vol. 10

<sup>741</sup> A similar turn of phrase was used by Dal Pozzo to describe the litigations that erupted between the bishop and []; *'...ma come il Demonio frà la sementa delle buone opera cerca di sparger zizania...'*, Dal Pozzo (1703), 548.

bishop to investigate whether the canons of the Mdina Cathedral Chapter were at fault. The details of the investigation are still conserved in a volume of the Cathedral Archives.<sup>742</sup> The vice parish priest Don Leonardo Bonavia testified that the canons were repeatedly asked by the bishop's vicar to prepare the ceremony for the translation of relics from Valletta, and they constantly ignored him up until a few days before. Then the matter escalated when the canons discovered that they would not be allowed to enter Valletta in procession to accompany the relics, since the Grand Master had decided, 'out of a personal devotion', to transfer the relics accompanied by his knights and priests, from the church of Porto Salvo to the church of the Capuchins.<sup>743</sup> One must note that the Capuchin's church was outside the city of Valletta. When the Vicar asked the Canons to accompany the relics on the second stage of the journey from the Capuchin church to Mdina, they openly refused, feeling they were outplayed by the Grand Master who did not want them to take precedence inside the Convent city of Valletta. Grand Master Wignacourt thus used space to assert a form of control over the ritual, claiming the city as a Hospitaller devotional territory. Moving the relics outside the city walls to the Capuchin church was not a move that relinquished control, but rather presented the fortifications of Valletta as both a material boundary as well as a spiritual one. Ultimately the Mdina canons had to comply. Cults occupy a physical space in a community and like any other temporal space, they cannot exist in isolation from temporal authorities.

### ***A Florentine Connection***

Among the many treasures that adorn Florence is a set of medals made from the Pauline *Terra Sigillata*. These medals were first noticed by George Zammit Maempel in the reserve collection of Casa Buonarroti, the family home of Fra Francesco Buonarroti. Fra Francesco joined the Order in 1598<sup>744</sup> and was in Malta roughly at the same time as Marc Antonio Haxiaq and Juan Benegas.<sup>745</sup> It is clear from the correspondence with his brother in Florence,

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<sup>742</sup> ACM 32 B, Vol. 10, 172.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>744</sup> Dal Pozzo, Ruolo, 180-181; Sebregondi Fiorentini, Ludovica, Francesco Buonarroti, 'Cavaliere Gerosolimitano e Architetto Dilettante', *Rivista d'Arte*, Jan I., 1986, 49-86.

<sup>745</sup> Francesco resided permanently in Malta from 1613 until his death in 1632: Sebregondi Fiorentini (1986), 74; during the Chapter General of 1631, he acted as the Procurator of the Prior of Pisa Fra Carlo de Medici, Dal Pozzo (1703), 792.

Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger,<sup>746</sup> that Francesco was not cut out for the heroic military life.<sup>747</sup> He was instead more inclined towards a life of study, research, and the arts. His service towards the Order concerned mainly bureaucratic matters. In fact, he occupied the prestigious roles of secretary of the Langue of Italy and later Grand Master de Paule's personal secretary. De Paule was painted next to Fra Francesco in one of the rooms of the Buonarroti house. (Fig. 37) We are very fortunate that Francesco was very close to his brother Michelangelo and the two exchanged letters frequently exchanged the great majority of which have survived. The substantial amount of correspondence between the Buonarroti brothers was kept by Michelangelo after the death of his younger brother, and they give fascinating details about Francesco's daily life in Malta, the intricacies of their business enterprises, and their circle of friends. The letters also touched upon a more personal note, detailing the thoughts and feelings of Francesco, including the illnesses that afflicted him<sup>748</sup> and his personal disappointment that he never became a renowned architect, which was his lifelong dream.<sup>749</sup> Since Francesco's stay coincided with the Order's growing interest in the Grotto, and seeing how a few examples of *Terra Sigillata* survive to this day in the house museum of Casa Buonarroti, it was to be expected that somewhere among the correspondence there was mention of St Paul and his cult. Indeed, the *Pietra di San Paolo lavorata* is mentioned on two occasions in 1621 and listed in Francesco's account books from 1622.<sup>750</sup>

The first entry in June 1621 concerns Michelangelo the Younger's project of setting up a *galleria*,<sup>751</sup> a word that usually referred to a sort of cabinet of curiosities or house museum. Other letters that Michelangelo received from some of his friends abroad, including ones from

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<sup>746</sup> On Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, see: Cole, Janie, 'Cultural Clientelism and Brokerage Networks in Early Modern Florence and Rome: New Correspondence between the Barberini and Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger', *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007), 729-788; Cecchi, Alessandro, Lombardi, Elena, and Spinelli Riccardo (eds.), *Michelangelo buonarroti il Giovane (1568-1647): Il Culto della Memoria* (Firenze: Edifir, 2021).

<sup>747</sup> See Sebregondi Fiorentini (1986).

<sup>748</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 107, f.401-2, 1622.

<sup>749</sup> In 1615, he was asked by Grand Master Wignacourt to design a resting place for himself and his brother who had died in Malta. This would have been the ideal opportunity for Francesco to showcase his skills. The designs for the two sepulchres for the Oratory of the beheading of St John in Valletta still exist, however the commission was never carried out, either because of the expenses involved or as Francesco believed, because of the involvement of someone jealous of him: Sebregondi Fiorentini (1986), 74-75; Arch. Buonarroti, 105 f.194.; Dal Pozzo (1703), 613-4.

<sup>750</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 122, Carte d'Amministrazione Vol.IV, 118, 1 Nov 1622 and 1 Dec 1622 (no pag.).

<sup>751</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 107, f.354; 6 June 1621.



*Figure 37: Fra Francesco Buonarroti and Grand Master Antoine De Paule (Courtesy - Museo Casa Buonarroti - Florence)*

the future Maltese Vice-Chancellor of the Order and proto-archaeologist Fra Gian Francesco Abela,<sup>752</sup> prove Michelangelo's fascination with collecting antiquities. His brother Francesco would regularly send him any items he thought might be of interest to his collection, as this letter testifies. These included a few corals and shells, wax casts from the Judas coin that was

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<sup>752</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 48, VIII, f.1069; 24 January 1630.

mentioned in Bosio's *Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce*, as well as a few vases. Two of these were large red earthenware jars and another four smaller drinking receptacles of undisclosed material or shape. Francesco makes it a point to mention a few times that the items were extremely fragile, and that one of the larger vases was already damaged. To ensure that the utmost care was taken during the voyage from Malta to Livorno on board the silk galleys, which would make stops in Messina and probably Naples, Fra Francesco labelled the case '*Pietra di San Paolo lavorata*'. Francesco wrote that he had played on the word Paolo, as some items were made in Paola in Calabria. The account books show red terracotta vases from Naples,<sup>753</sup> but it is not clear if they were subsequently coated with a white slip made from crushed Maltese limestone. He then went on to say 'I know you will probably laugh at these modest objects, but I apologise as I do not know what to send you from here [Malta] and nowadays everyone has some *Pietra di San Paolo*', as if he's telling him that his collection could benefit from a few samples of *Terra Sigillata*.<sup>754</sup> Ten days later, their nephew Raimondo Barducci wrote to Michelangelo from Messina. The short letter simply informed Michelangelo that his brother Francesco would be sending him a case of *Pietra di San Paolo* shaped in vases and other souvenirs.<sup>755</sup>

So far, research has not yielded any information on who the artisans who made these souvenirs were, nor who was initially responsible for the distribution. Bartolomeo dal Pozzo wrote (1703) that Grand Master Wignacourt had *de facto* taken possession of the Grotto and the distribution of the *Terra di San Paolo* in 1610, which was well before the Order formally took possession of the shrine.<sup>756</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest surviving specimen of *Terra Sigillata Melitensis* which is decorated with Hospitaller motifs is dated 1589. (Fig. 38) It is a small rectangular piece in the shape of a book, with a relief of Grand Master Verdalle on one side, and his coat of arms and dates on the other.<sup>757</sup> The occasion and receiver of this item are unknown, although it could possibly be linked with Verdalle's elevation to the Cardinalate. It demonstrates an early attempt by the Order to use the international popularity of *Terra*

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<sup>753</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 122, Carte d'Amministrazione Vol. IV, 1 September 1621.

<sup>754</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 107, f.354; 6 June 1621; '*Io so che voi forse ci ridere di queste bagatelle ma scusatemi che di qua non so che mi vi mandare, e pietra di San Paolo oramai ognuno ne porta.*'

<sup>755</sup> "*galanterie*": Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 43, III, f.343; 16 June 1621

<sup>756</sup> Dal Pozzo (1703), 547.

<sup>757</sup> Basel, Schweizerisches Parmazie Historisches Museum, reproduced in Zammit Maempel (2010), 124.



*Sigillata* as a means of promotion, which would later be made even more evident in the Buonarroti medals.





*Figure 38: Examples of Early Terra Sigillata Melitensis bearing Hospitaller Insigna, Representations of St Paul and St John the Baptist and the Bust and Coat of Arms of Grand Master Verdala (overleaf) [courtesy: Schweizerisches Parmazie Historisches Museum – Basel]*







Figure 39: Terra Sigillata Melitensis Cup with Hospitaller Insigna, the head of St Paul and Venomous Insects, Collezione Giuseppe Monti - Bologna (Courtesy - Museo Geologico di Bologna)

Meanwhile, multilingual pamphlets (or handbills) detailing the 'Virtues of the Pietra di San Paolo' were circulating in Europe,<sup>758</sup> and some give us information on how exactly these items were manufactured and in what form they were distributed. To mention some examples, in August 1620, Fra Teseo Cavigliati, Prior of Capua, informed the Duke of Mantova that he had sent him a box of St Paul's antidote earth, along with a *recetta*, or handbill.<sup>759</sup> The Duke of Mantova had recently passed on a relic of St Paul to Juan Benegas which would constitute one of the most treasured possessions of the Grotto.<sup>760</sup> The *spoglio* of Fra Amadeo Rovero, Bailiff of St Euphemia (d. 1664) mentioned '*devotioni e figurine di Pietra di San Paolo*'.<sup>761</sup>

Vases and cups are specifically mentioned. These pamphlets consistently mention that the best way to make use of *Terra Sigillata* items was to drink from cup-shaped specimens. The practical use of cups is documented at least once during an epidemic in Paros (Greece) in 1641. French Jesuit missionaries in Paros, Greece, exhorted those on whom traditional remedies had not worked, to drink from *Terra Sigillata* Cups as a last resort. The success of

<sup>758</sup> Zammit Maempel (2010), 63-67.

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid.*, 82; Baronti, Giancarlo, *Tra bambini e acque sporche, immersioni nella collezione di amuleti di Giuseppe Bellucci* (Perugia: Morlacchi ed., 2008), 292.

<sup>760</sup> The relic and reliquary still exist in the Collegiate Church of St Paul in Rabat.

<sup>761</sup> ACM, *Spogli*, Fra Amadeo Rovero Vol. 16A, f.433r

this practice is hard to assess from the sources.<sup>762</sup> Two examples of cups, or rather small bowls, survive in museums. One is in the Sloane Collection of the British Museum, London, and the other is in the Giuseppe Monti Collection of the Geological Museum in Bologna,<sup>763</sup> (Fig.39) possibly belonging to the great collector Ulisse Aldrovandi. Both are decorated with motifs that link them to other *Terra Sigillata* objects such as the Pauline emblems, an eight-pointed cross, serpents, and other venomous insects. Since the Barducci letter suggested that Francesco Buonarroti sent vases to Florence in 1621, a discussion with the curators of Casa Buonarroti as to their possible existence, revealed that they had seventeen vases, jars, or cups made of a white *bolo* (earthenware) of unknown origin, strongly suspected to be apothecary vessels from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Their form resembles *bucaros*, containers famous in Spanish and Portuguese territories for the perfumed aroma they supposedly emanated when filled with water. It was customary in the early seventeenth century, especially for women, to break and eat shards of this delicate earthenware, believed to possess thaumaturgical and beautifying properties.<sup>764</sup> The similarities with the known uses of *Terra Melitensis* are substantial. One possible explanation, following a careful examination of the artefacts,<sup>765</sup> is that Francesco Buonarroti capitalised on these parallelisms to create a unique set of objects by whitewashing the red terracotta *bucaros* in a white Pauline-limestone slip, producing a set of vases that would have certainly aroused the viewer's curiosity. According to his own account books, the procurement of *Terra Sigillata* generally cost Francesco two scudi, which by way of comparison, was as much as his monthly trip to the barber cost.<sup>766</sup>

Two further letters, this time from 1623, prove that Fra Francesco habitually sent *Terra Sigillata* as gifts to friends and family as if it were the souvenir from Malta par excellence. On 23 June, he told Michelangelo that he was sending some gifts for a friend's collection, including a gilded inkwell, a silver powder shaker for the ink and a pair of Spanish gloves.

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<sup>762</sup> Zammit Maempel, George, 'Rocks from St Paul's Grotto (Malta) in Medicine and Folklore' in J. Azzopardi (ed), *St Paul's Grotto, Church and Museum at Rabat, Malta* (Malta, Progress Press, 1990), 204.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-207.

<sup>764</sup> García Rodríguez, María del Pilar and Álvarez García, Beatriz, 'Origen y distribución de arcillas utilizadas en la fabricación de búcaros: bucarofagia en la Edad Moderna', *Physis Terrae*, Vol. 1, nr.1, (2019), 57-71.

<sup>765</sup> With special thanks to Alessandro Cecchi, Elena Lombardi, and Marcella Marongiu from Casa Buonarroti, as well as the professionals sent by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure who handled the artefacts and offered their expert opinion.

<sup>766</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 122, Carte d'Amministrazione Vol. IV.

Other than that, the only other objects he had available were some Ottoman bows, swords and stone from the Grotto. Francesco Buonarroti, however, thought their friend already owned samples of the former and was not very interested in the latter.<sup>767</sup> Nonetheless, the following month he wrote again to his brother saying he would be sending a large box of ‘*Pietra di San Paolo lavorata*’ for their sister-in-law.<sup>768</sup> The letters also mention Francesco Borromei from Borgo San Niccolo in Florence, who was a member of the Florentine branch (Borromeo di San Miniato) of the Milanese Borromeo that Carlo Borromeo descended from directly. This Francesco Borromei had a younger brother, also Carlo, who had been a member of the Order since 1596.<sup>769</sup> The letter is not clear whether Francesco Borromei was supposed to receive any of the *Terra Sigillata* items that were in the box, since the instructions that Francesco Buonarroti attached for his sister-in-law have not been traced, nor do we know whether or not she delivered said items.

A large collection of thirty-three *Terra Sigillata* medals and two others in the shape of books, still surviving in Casa Buonarroti, point to Fra Francesco Buonarroti being one of the main promoters of *Terra Sigillata*, and by extension the Pauline cult, in the early seventeenth century. The Latin abbreviation ‘CVM PRIVILEG.’ or simply ‘CVM P. AN.X’ suggests that some sort of license was given to Francesco to stamp his own TSM medals, some even bearing his coat of arms on the obverse, although no such document was ever found among Buonarroti’s papers or elsewhere.

Understanding who commissioned the medals, for whom, and why, is particularly important in the case of the Buonarroti collection, as they seem to be the only such medals that feature a substantial number of saints and blessed along with St Paul, including Hospitaller saints. In the Buonarroti iconography, St Paul could be considered a secondary figure, since he is represented on only four of thirty-three medals; one in bust; one in a scene showing the shipwreck; and in two praying in the Grotto. Much more attention is given to the saints and blessed of the Order as described in the previous chapter, along with St John the Baptist, St

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<sup>767</sup> Arch. Buonarroti Vol. 107, f.412; 23 June 1623.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, f.413; 15 July 1623.

<sup>769</sup> This was two years before Francesco Buonarroti joined, making them roughly the same age. Therefore, it is plausible that the two knew each other and met in Malta or Florence. See: Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo...*, 176-177.

Carlo Borromeo, St Sebastian, St Lawrence, St Louis of France, and St Catherine of Siena. Two nativity scenes and a crucifixion of Christ with the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist are also represented. The choice of these saints is hardly surprising, given that the year 1622 is stamped on some of these medals. The link with St Carlo Borromeo has been discussed extensively in the previous chapters. St Sebastian was one of the saints associated with the plague,<sup>770</sup> as well as the patron of all French knights from the *langue* of Auvergne. The cult of St Lawrence in Malta was intricately linked to the Order's first Conventual Church in Vittoriosa, to whom the church was dedicated, as well as a popular saint with the Medici family who were the patrons of the Buonarroti family. St Louis of France was a personal favourite of Grand Master Wignacourt, though the crusader king was undoubtedly very popular with many other knights from the French-speaking *langues*. In 1620, Fra Jacques Chenu de Bellay built an altar to St Louis in the church of Liesse and established a pontifical feast every 25 August. Finally, St Catherine was from Tuscany like Francesco Buonarroti but was also very popular with all the knights from the *langue* of Italy.



Figure 40: Buonarroti Terra Sigillata Medals with the Coat of Arms of Baronio (Left) and Grand Master Vasconcellos (Right) (Courtesy - Museo Casa Buonarroti, Florence)

That the *Terra di S. Paolo* items were not all intended for the same individual seems a plausible explanation for the diversity of saints they represented. The reverse on one of these medals

<sup>770</sup> Which incidentally struck Malta in 1623, soon after Francesco sent the medals to Italy: Arch. Buonarroti Vol. 107, f.414.

proves that the medals that survived formed part of a greater amount manufactured specifically for dissemination. Whilst most medals bear the arms of Francesco Buonarroti, and one of Grand Master Vasconcellos (died 7 March 1623), one has the coat of arms of Cardinal Cesare Baronio<sup>771</sup> on the reverse, accompanied by the inscription D[ominus] Constant[inus] Caetan D[at] D[edit] D[edicat] Caesare Baronio S[ancte] R[omane] E[cclesie] Cardi[nalis]. This dedication has been largely overlooked, even by George Zammit Maempel who first published the image of the medal.<sup>772</sup> The Benedictine Costantino Caetani or Gaetani (d.1650) was one of the most important hagiographers in Counter-Reformation Italy, who assisted Baronio by supplying him with some of the hagiographies he published in the *Annales*.<sup>773</sup> Caetani had also supplied hagiographies to the Vice-Chancellor of the Order Gian Francesco Abela, specifically a verse from the martyrology of Pulsano which mentioned a twelfth-century Benedictine monastery in Malta.<sup>774</sup> Abela was a friend of both Francesco and Michelangelo Buonarroti; with the former because they both occupied high bureaucratic positions in Malta, with the latter for their common love of antiquarianism.<sup>775</sup>

The theory that Caetani commissioned the medals from Francesco Buonarroti as gifts to Baronio seems implausible given that Baronio died in 1607, which does not tally with the period we know Francesco was stamping *Terra Sigillata*. Yet it does not exclude a posthumous dedication if all the medals were manufactured in 1622-23. Quite the contrary, 1622 was the year of publication of Bosio's *Imagini de Santi e Beati*, a hagiography of Hospitaller saints. Incidentally, Costantino Caetani was the brother and collaborator of the Jesuit hagiographer Ottavio Caetani, author of the *Vitae Sanctorum Sicolorum*. Ottavio died in 1620 before he could see either his own or Bosio's work published, but the previous chapter has provided

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<sup>771</sup> For a complete study on the life and works of Cesare Baronio, see; *Cesare Baronio tra santità e scrittura storica*, Guazzelli, Michetti and Scorza Barcellona (eds.) (Rome: Viella, 2012).

<sup>772</sup> Zammit Maempel (2010), 333, 342; the author could not identify who Costantino Caetani was.

<sup>773</sup> Ditchfield, 'Liturgy, Sanctity and History', 151; Gaetani was from Syracuse, but after becoming a Benedictine was soon called to Rome, where he would eventually serve as the custodian of the Vatican Library, a job that brought him into closer contact with Baronio. He is most known for the foundation of the Collegium Gregorianum Domus S. Benedicti in Urbe, which had one of the best hagiographical libraries in Rome. The Collegium was to serve as the backbone for the foundation of the Propoganda Fide college which Gaetani gave over to that Congregation in 1643. Gaetani assisted numerous other hagiographers through his collection of over 300 manuscript hagiographers, including Pietro Maria Campi, whose life and work were studied by Ditchfield in the cited volume.

<sup>774</sup> Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela', 112.

<sup>775</sup> Abela wrote to Michaelangelo Buonarroti on 24 January 1630, telling him about an inscription he had found in the ditch of the Gozo castle: Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 48, VIII f.1069.

proof that he was collaborating with the Order on the life of St Gherland commander of Caltagirone.<sup>776</sup> Furthermore, Ottavio Caetani was in correspondence with the Maltese Jesuit Girolamo Manduca, who was supplying him with information on matters relating to the cult of St Paul, the apparition of St Paul that saved the island from the Moors, and the church in St Paul's Bay where the shipwreck took place. In 1608, Manduca wrote to Ottavio Caetani, telling him about a supposed villa of the Roman *Protos* St Publius, in Wardija. They were both trying to find the place mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles where St Paul healed the father of the Roman governor and first bishop of Malta.<sup>777</sup> Caetani and Manduca, who both resided in Sicily, were in frequent contact with another Sicilian historian, Rocco Pirri. Pirri was also interested in the cult of St Paul and had visited Malta in 1611, taking with him pieces of the Grotto stone.<sup>778</sup> All three were extensively cited by Gian Francesco Abela in his *Della Descrittione di Malta*, the culmination of more than thirty years of research and collaboration between scholars in Malta, Sicily, and Rome.

In the absence of further documentary evidence, it would be difficult to prove anything more than these connections. The names of Caetani, Baronio, Bosio, Abela, Buonarroti, and possibly the involvement of the Milanese Borromeo or the Florentine Borromei, all make sense in this context of holy memorabilia and hagiographies. These names show the fluidity of this Grotto which was both a sacred space, as well as a geological feature that could be transformed into a memento or an object of devotion. It also proves that these objects travelled along Hospitaller networks and that in doing so they also carried a message that went beyond a simple souvenir from a shrine on the frontier of Christianity. They solicited the support of the bearer towards the Order's causes, be they the big battles on the high seas, or the less dramatic conflicts in the corridors and offices of the Roman Curia.

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<sup>776</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 110, f.66, 29 March 1619.

<sup>777</sup> Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela', 123; N.L.M. Ms. 25, f.203-204 and a copy in Ms. 165, f.109.

<sup>778</sup> Luttrell, 125.

## Conclusion

In her study on the cult of St Vincent Ferrer in Brittany, Elizabeth Tingle presented this as a case study for understanding the relationship between sainthood and politics in the Baroque age.<sup>779</sup> Her analysis began with the 1636 *Vies des Saints de la Bretagne* by the Dominican Albert Le Grand, which was sponsored by the civil authorities of Brittany, but soon led to a great resurgence in the cult of one saint in particular, the Catalan St Vincent. Although this saint stood out among the hagiographies of others who were either of Breton or French origin, his relationship with the Ducal family made him an excellent candidate to promote Brittany's long-standing autonomy, privileges, and ancient traditions in the face of the growing encroachment of the French crown. As Tingle noted, and as has been also mentioned in other parts of this thesis, saints were often called upon to support dynastic and political ends.<sup>780</sup> One can draw out two connected points from Tingle's study on Vannes; firstly, 'It is argued that Brittany's self-identity as a culturally, legally and politically distinct province within the French kingdom was closely related to the holy actions and favoured places of its special local saints.'<sup>781</sup> One could argue that, through the cult of St Paul, the Order was also attempting to establish some sort of spiritual singularity. The inclusion of Hospitaller saints reinforced the connection between St Paul's Island and the Order's Island as one and the same, a *semper eadem* of sorts.

Secondly, the timing of when all this is taking place must be stressed. The resurgence in the cults of saints took place in many parts of the Catholic world, almost simultaneously in the first three or four decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>782</sup> Tingle, for instance, argued that the resurgence of the cult of St Vincent Ferrer came 'at a time of increased Tridentine-inspired

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<sup>779</sup> Tingle, Elizabeth, 'Sainthood and politics in the Baroque Age: The cult of St Vincent Ferrer in Brittany, France', *Journal of Baroque Studies* 1, Vol. 1 (2013), 5-32.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>781</sup> Tingle (2013), 7.

<sup>782</sup> For a good overview of the major exponents during this period, see : Ditchfield, Simon, 'What Was Sacred History (Mostly Roman) Catholic Uses for the Christian Past after Trent' in Van Liere, Ditchfield and Louthan (eds.), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 2012), 73-97; Jean-Marie Le Gall uses the term 'hagiographic renaissance' to refer to a movement that was largely spread over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, it is clear even from his work on France that although sacred history and hagiography was not a new trend, there was a heightened activity in the wake of Baronio's *Annales* until the mid-seventeenth century. See: Le Gall, Jean-Marie, 'Lives of the Saints in the French Renaissance c.1500-1650', in Van Liere, Ditchfield and Louthan (eds.), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 2012), 210-230.

activity in Brittany, with the introduction of new devotions, internal missionary activity and renewed attention paid to sacred sites and objects'.<sup>783</sup> The years between the canonisation of Borromeo (1610) and that of the spectacular canonisation ceremony in 1622 of Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Philip Neri, Therese of Avila, and Isidore of Madrid, are the veritable golden years for historians wanting to 'think with saints' of the counter-reformation period.<sup>784</sup> The renewed interest of the Order in the cult of St Paul from 1610 onwards marks a Maltese case study for this wider phenomenon. What links this chapter to the next, is that the first clear signs of a concerted effort by the Order to promote cults of saints in a Maltese and Hospitaller context appear no sooner than half a century from the final session of the Council of Trent. Even if nominally, the Council was the point of departure of Tridentine Catholicism, change was certainly not immediate. The study of the cult of saints, the focus of the two chapters in this section, provides more depth to our understanding of the chronology of Catholic reform which undoubtedly stretches well beyond the chronology considered by this work.<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> Tingle (2013), 5.

<sup>784</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, 'Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern Period', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Spring 2009), 552-584.

<sup>785</sup> For a study that argues in favour a much longer Counter-Reformation period, see: McNamara, Celeste, *The Bishop's Burden: Reforming the Catholic Church in Early Modern Italy* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America P., 2020).



## Chapter 5 – *Vitae Sanctorum*

The Catholic Church has always celebrated sanctity as an expression of the works of God with his people, but the only way to determine occurrences of sanctity with any degree of certainty was through an elaborate judicial process.<sup>786</sup> In many ways, saints are not just individuals chosen by God, but also men and women chosen by a particular group of people as role models. Whilst most Christian denominations retain saints as only moral exemplars, Catholics, as discussed in the previous chapters in relation to their saints' earthly remains and possessions, venerate saints as channels of divine power. This consequently invited criticism of the Catholic Church's choice of some of these individuals and the central role the saints, and more so their materiality, occupied in religious practices. In truth, the Catholic Church itself, aware of the 'ambiguities of the holy',<sup>787</sup> constantly sought to redefine the meaning of sanctity, particularly by refining the canonisation process. The first part of this chapter will give a general overview of this process in order to provide an idea of the framework that surrounds the Hospitaller case studies that will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

'If saints did not exist, we would have to invent them' asserted Simon Ditchfield,<sup>788</sup> which is why, despite all the criticism, the Catholic Church could not indefinitely suspend the process of universal canonisations. In 1588, following continuing pressure from Philip II of Spain, St Peter's Basilica held the first public canonisation in 65 years, the candidate being the friar Diego d'Alcalà (d.1463).<sup>789</sup> The apparent reason for such a long understating of the saints' factory<sup>790</sup> was that Protestants mocked the whole Catholic approach to sainthood. Even though Rome might have had issues with some manifestations of sainthood that were borderline superstitious, the 65-year hiatus was also a symptom of the fracture in the

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<sup>786</sup> Hernandez Rodriguez, Maria Victoria, 'El Proceso de las Causas para normativizar las causas de beatificación y canonización: de la *Constitutio Immensa Aeterni Dei* (Sixto V, 1588) al breve *Caelestis Hierusalem Cives* (Urbano VIII, 1634)' in *A la luz de Roma: Santos y santidad en el barroco iberoamericano*, F. Quiles Garcia, J. Garcia Bernal, P. Broggio and M. Fagiolo Dell'Arco [eds.] (Rome and Seville: Roma-Tre P., 2020), 44.

<sup>787</sup> Olds, Katrina, 'The Ambiguities of the Holy: Authenticating Relics in Seventeenth-Century Spain', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 135-184.

<sup>788</sup> Ditchfield, *Thinking with Saints*, 584.

<sup>789</sup> Copeland, Claire, 'Sanctity' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter Reformation*, A. Bamji, G. Hannsen and M. Laven (eds.) (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 225; The previous canonisations, that of saints Benno of Meissen and Antonio of Florence, had taken place in 1523.

<sup>790</sup> A nickname given to the process of making saints in the Catholic Church.

networks within the Catholic Church that facilitated the canonisation process. 'In the confessionally divided world, papal canonisation became ever more a political act, in which dynastic power and geography spoke louder than favoured models of sanctity or even tighter judicial procedure.'<sup>791</sup> Nevertheless, the dynastically powerful, well-connected, and militarily steadfast Hospitallers did not have a single canonisation in the early modern period, if one considers strictly papally canonised saints. An argument on which this chapter will elaborate with Hospitaller examples is the need for reading holiness as not merely a top-down imposition, but as a tool of 'reciprocity within a relationship of inequality',<sup>792</sup> between the local and the universal. Saints needed patronage as much as they needed miracles.<sup>793</sup>

### ***Old and New, Saints and Blessed***

Theologically speaking, all the faithful departed who have been admitted into heaven are saints; but the main difference between canonisation and general sainthood lies in the process that qualifies the candidate servant of God as a venerable, blessed, or saint. This process of seeking individuals and presenting them to the universal Church for veneration is ongoing, as is the development of the institution which is meant to examine these individuals. Maria Hernandez Rodriguez summarizes the notion of saints and saint-making in the Catholic Church in five points.<sup>794</sup> First, there are two aspects that are of interest to the process: the life of the candidate and the miracles. These two together comprise what is commonly referred to as the *fama sanctitatis et signorum* which constitutes the claim of a candidate to sainthood. Second, there are three main voices involved in the process: the *vox populi* (the people's devotion towards a candidate) the *vox Dei* (God's will that is expressed through signs and miracles), and the *vox hierarchiae* (the proclamation by the Church authority confirming the convergence of the devotion of the people with the work of God). 3. Christ's example is the measure by which sanctity is weighed. The saint's imitation of Christ is given precedence

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<sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>792</sup> Ditchfield, 'S. Carlo and the Cult of Saints', 146.

<sup>793</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, "'Coping with Beati Moderni'", *Canonization Procedure in the Aftermath of the Council of Trent*, *Selected historical papers from conferences held at Loyola and Rome in 2006* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2010), 414.

<sup>794</sup> Hernandez Rodriguez, 44-46.

over how far the saints themselves were imitated by those around them. 4. The power that the Catholic Church has in declaring saints stems from the fact that it itself is holy. Despite knowing that individuals within the institution could be deeply flawed, the Church's sanctity is believed to derive from Christ being the head of the allegorical body. 5. The process of canonisation is a 'canonical' process, therefore it is judicial in nature albeit unique compared to any other form of legal process. The canonisation process is not litigious, cannot be appealed, and serves the papacy only in an advisory role.

These points, particularly the *vox populi* and the *vox hierarchiae*, can partly explain why historians continue to show interest in Catholic canonisations. Primarily, aside from the supernatural signs, saints are the product of a community's choice and are therefore embodiments of qualities that those people uphold as ideal. In no period of Church history was this 'ideal' presented so vigorously, the cults of saints made so elaborate, and the process so exacting than during the Tridentine period. In the introduction to the Bollandists' multi-volume hagiographies, the seventeenth century specifically is termed 'the century of saints'.<sup>795</sup> Scholars such as John Bossy,<sup>796</sup> Peter Burke,<sup>797</sup> Donald Weinstein, Rudolph Bell,<sup>798</sup> and Simon Ditchfield<sup>799</sup> amongst others, have studied saints in an attempt to understand the relationship between societal norms and patterns of Catholic cults of saints in early modern Europe. One has to keep in mind that before achieving saintly status, saints were members of society or a particular group of people, such as a religious order. They interacted with people, preached widely, and possibly even performed miracles. They were, therefore, already powerful life-changers before their death. Their presence and achievements in life, within a particular community, directly touched the hearts and minds of those around them, long before they were even considered for canonisation: cults were born, Saints' earthly

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<sup>795</sup> Miguel Gotor, *Chiesa e santità nell'Italia Moderna* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004), 93.

<sup>796</sup> Bossy, John, 'Holiness and Society', *Past & Present*, No. 75 (May 1977), 119-137.

<sup>797</sup> Burke, Peter, 'How to Become a Counter-Reformation Saint' in Kaspar von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (London, German Historical Institute, 1984), 45-55.

<sup>798</sup> Weinstein, Donald and Bell, Rudolph M., *Saints and Society, The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago, Chicago U.P., 1986).

<sup>799</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, "'Coping with Beati Moderni'", 413-439; 'Tridentine Worship and the cult of saints', in Po-Chia Hsia, Ronnie (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol.6 Reform and Expansion 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007), 201-224; 'S. Carlo and the Cult of Saints', *Studia Borromaeica*, 20 (2006), 145-154; 'How not to be a counter-reformation saint', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, LX (1992), 379-422; 'Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Spring 2009), 552-584.

possessions became relics, and their graves became shrines. This domestic presence of saints, including people venerated as holy but who never actually became officially recognised by Rome, creates a deeper discussion on the role of saints in Catholic Tridentine devotion. Ditchfield, for instance, writes of a 'dynamic nature and range of the cultural work performed by sanctity and the cult of saints'. This involved family honour, justification of the use of images, advancing scientific rigour, encouraging historical research, redefining sacred space, particularly in contested areas, assisting the assertion of pastoral authority, and providing convincing narratives for saints of dubious origins.<sup>800</sup>

One of the concluding remarks of the previous chapter concerned the matter of timing, that is, understanding why the Order started promoting its saints when it did and how it chose those individuals. Similarly, a question arises of why it took the Church until the seventeenth century to truly get the 'saint factory' in full motion, when all throughout the sixteenth century it had plenty of examples to choose from. Though some individuals like Philip Neri (d.1595) were canonised a mere 27 years after his death, Ignatius Loyola (d.1556) and Francis Xavier (d.1552), canonised alongside Neri, had been in line far longer. It took even longer for the Church to start recognising sixteenth-century martyrs, with the 26 martyrs of Nagasaki killed in 1597 being possibly the only exception.<sup>801</sup> It took more than a century for the canonisation of the 19 priests and monks hanged by the Dutch Calvinists in Gorkum in 1572, and the beatification of the Jesuits killed by the Huguenots in 1570 was started in 1628 but only concluded in 1857.

Despite this apparent reluctance in the immediate years after Trent, the seventeenth century recorded a spike in canonisations compared to the previous century, with a total of 14 saints and 43 beatifications<sup>802</sup> the most spectacular being in 1622, when five candidates were canonised together in one ceremony: St Therese of Avila (d.1582), St Ignatius Loyola (d.1556), St Francis Xavier (d.1552), St Philip Neri (d.1595), and St Isidore Labrador (d.1130). Only one of the four canonised was a layman (Isidore Labrador), who was also the only saint who had

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<sup>800</sup> Ditchfield, *Thinking with Saints*, 584.

<sup>801</sup> They were beatified in 1627, see: Omata Rappo, Hitomi, 'Death on the Cross; the Beatification of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Nagasaki (1627) and the Iconography of the Crucifixion', *A la luz de Roma: Santos y santidad en el barroco iberoamericano, Volumen III: Tierra de santidad* (Roma: Roma Tre Press, 2020), 129-150.

<sup>802</sup> Between formal and informal; Ditchfield, 'S. Carlo and the cult of saints', 146.

not lived during the sixteenth century. However, he had the backing of King Philip III of Spain. Alongside these, there were literally hundreds of other candidates, 'men and women who merely enjoyed *fama sanctitatis* throughout the Catholic world during the period; they should therefore be set beside the mere fourteen who were papally canonised (1588-1665).'<sup>803</sup> A case in point, the Order's *beati e santi* (to borrow the term directly from Bosio's book),<sup>804</sup> are some of the men and women of *fama sanctitatis* that this study is proposing to place alongside the 14 canonised. These Hospitaller saints received an equipollent canonisation, meaning an endorsement of an older cult as saints, but without being papally canonised anew in the period 1588-1665. In connection with this, Ditchfield adds that:

'... we need to move beyond the identification of the history of the cult of saints with the history of canonization and appreciate that during the period never had so many saints (from *all* periods of Christian history) been integrated into Roman Catholic worship and devotion. Moreover, the inclusion of those whose universal cults were approved by Rome in the list of those who received papal recognition (1588-1665) points to the issue which Trent placed centre stage: how to reconcile particular, local practice with universal, Roman precepts.'<sup>805</sup>

A point of order needs to be made, in line with this distinction that Ditchfield mentions; that even during the frequent canonisation hiatus (1524-1588), the papacy still endorsed at least 14 cases of non-universal cults, meaning that the hiatus argument only applies in matters of universal worship.<sup>806</sup>

In this context of old and new, the saints that predated Trent and the *beati moderni*,<sup>807</sup> as well as reforms in the distinction between categories of sainthood, defining what is 'Tridentine' and what is 'holy' for our early modern Hospitallers could prove to be a complex endeavour. The Council only recognised saints as 'teachers of holy living', but the process of

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<sup>803</sup> Ditchfield, *Tridentine Worship and the Cult of the Saints*, 215.

<sup>804</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione...*(Roma: Facciotti, 1622).

<sup>805</sup> Ditchfield, *Tridentine Worship and the Cult of the Saints*, 207.

<sup>806</sup> Ditchfield, 'Coping with the Beati Moderni', 419.

<sup>807</sup> See: Ditchfield, 'Coping with the Beati Moderni'.

refashioning sainthood itself would be much longer.<sup>808</sup> Katrina Olds challenges even the simplistic idea that the Holy See's rubber stamp on saints' cults was a straight forward task; 'even at the heart of the Catholic world, defining holiness in the Counter-Reformation was remarkably difficult, in spite of ongoing Roman reforms meant to centralize and standardize the authentication of saints and relics.'<sup>809</sup> Even in the sacred texts, the use of *hagios*, meaning holiness, is ambiguous. The same word was used for both living and dead individuals, prophets, apostles, and martyrs as well as the Holy Spirit and Christ, without giving a clear indication of how to identify holiness in an individual.<sup>810</sup> Once again, religious orders played a vital role in this exercise, in particular when it came to promoting new saints alongside older ones as a means of providing continuity in the face of ambiguity.<sup>811</sup> This is what we have seen taking place with Fra Francesco Buonarroti's *Terra Sigillata* medals, namely the representation of Hospitaller saints alongside others from the period of Christian persecution like St Paul, St Sebastian, and St Lawrence (all with strong Roman ties), medieval Saints like St Catherine of Siena and St Louis of France, and contemporary saints like St Carlo Borromeo.

Despite the great input that the religious orders gave to the process of defining holiness, the Roman Curia also supported the choice of individuals via mechanisms that assessed whether these ideals of sainthood conformed with their own ideas. The 1588 Bull *Immensa aeterni Dei* by Pope Sixtus V signified an important milestone in this negotiated process of defining Tridentine sainthood, between the universal and the particular. This decree gave birth to the Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies. This body of the Roman Curia was set up, amongst other things, to analyse both sainthood and the place of saints in Catholic liturgy, thus denoting the growing association between the worship of saints and daily ritual in parish life. As far as the process itself went, the Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies? still retained the two-part procedure whereby a diocesan authority identified and assessed the *fama sanctitatis*, and collected documentation, while auditors of the Sacra Rota (Apostolic Tribunal) authenticated the documents and subsequently presented them to the Congregation. This procedure, therefore can be considered as a process of universalising the particular. Arguably,

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<sup>808</sup> Copeland, 'Sanctity', 227

<sup>809</sup> Olds, 'The Ambiguities of the Holy', 135.

<sup>810</sup> Copeland, 'Sanctity', 226.

<sup>811</sup> Burke, 131.

however, the papacy had been exercising some form of control over the particular since the establishment of the Roman Inquisition in 1542, which was also tasked with the eradication of superstition by controlling unsanctioned cults.<sup>812</sup>

Ditchfield's definition of 'reciprocity within a relationship of inequality'<sup>813</sup> becomes particularly evident with the establishment of the Congregation of Rites, as the Church gradually tightened the grip on cults of saints, shutting down any instances in which Catholic zeal towards a particular candidate bypassed this system. A case in point is the *Dubia de beatissimis non canonizatis a S.mo D.N. Formata* in 1602,<sup>814</sup> a papal response to the growing cults of three great heroes of the Counter-Reformation, Carlo Borromeo, Philip Neri, and Ignatius Loyola. All three would eventually be canonised and their ceremonies (as well as their contribution to the Counter-Reformation Church in general) are considered cornerstones of Baroque devotionality.<sup>815</sup> Nevertheless, in 1602, they had not yet been officially listed among the saints and could not enjoy the same level of veneration as the saints of the universal Church.<sup>816</sup> Further to the Congregation of Rites and the Congregation of the Holy Office, Pope Clement VIII convened a Congregation for the Blessed, composed of 16 cardinals and as many consultants.<sup>817</sup> Furthermore, in 1625, Pope Urban VIII officially prohibited the veneration of non-canonised individuals.<sup>818</sup> It was also forbidden to reproduce images of Servants of God (a term used for candidates whose procedure had not been concluded) crowned with a nimbus.<sup>819</sup> They could not be venerated in private or public, their tombs could not be decorated in a similar way to those of saints, and it was forbidden to publish *vitae* that stated that any miracles were done by these individuals unless it was expressly permitted by the Congregation of Rites. Nonetheless, Pope Urban reiterated the importance of securing documents and images *ad futuram memoriam*, lest these amendments have the undesired effect of stifling regional involvement in preserving images, *ex votos*, or testimonies that could later serve the process. Additionally, a window was kept open for the candidature of

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<sup>812</sup> Ditchfield, 'Coping with the beati moderni', 417.

<sup>813</sup> Ditchfield, 'S. Carlo and the Cult of Saints', 146.

<sup>814</sup> See: Noyes, Ruth S., 'On the Fringes of Center: Disputed Hagiographic Imagery and the Crisis over the Beati moderni in Rome ca. 1600', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Fall 2011), 800-846.

<sup>815</sup> Giovanni Papa explains the importance of Borromeo's canonisation procedure in particular; Papa (2001),

<sup>816</sup> Noyes, 817.

<sup>817</sup> Noyes, 817.

<sup>818</sup> Hernandez Rodriguez, 57.

<sup>819</sup> Noyes, 813.

individuals whose cults had been documented for at least a hundred years prior to this edict. This allowed the veneration of many martyrs whose lives were not documented with the same rigour expected of the '*beati moderni*'.<sup>820</sup>

The process thus became long and expensive and a candidate for sainthood needed more than just signs from God; he or she had to have a powerful patron, reliable connections in Rome, a recognised cult, and someone who tirelessly advocated their cause. It is in this light that one can speak of the 'splendid canonization ceremony' of 1622 as an 'end of a chapter in the history of canonization'.<sup>821</sup> In principle, Rome still wanted devotees to identify possible individuals for future canonisations based on their *fama* (known as the *processus ordinarius*),<sup>822</sup> so the faithful were still allowed to foster affinities towards any saintly candidate, so long as certain parameters were not breached, such as distributing holy images or having a liturgical feast without the expressed consent of the Congregation of Rites. Despite the bureaucratic process, the Church still based saint-making on the interpretation of the will of God and miracles were one way to assess if an individual was really in heaven or not. The exposition of the sacrament for 40 hours in the papal basilica preceded the final decision, as the consistory prayed for divine enlightenment.<sup>823</sup>

### ***Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi***

Since its very inception, the Order had to find a delicate middle-ground between Papal obedience and regional adaptation. This became much more complicated when individual members were related by blood to the reigning pontiff, or when the Pope's plans for the Order interfered with internal government. After all, the Pope was the spiritual head of the Order and it was not unheard of that individual knights complained that the Pope was going to be the ruin of the Order.<sup>824</sup> At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Order of St

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<sup>820</sup> Noyes, 818.

<sup>821</sup> Ditchfield, '*Coping with the Beati Moderni*', 413-414.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>823</sup> Hernandez Rodriguez, 58.

<sup>824</sup> B.A.V., Barb. lat. 6676, f.31 v.; "...che il Bosio [Giovanni Ottone] l'haveva tenuto in camera più di due hore predicandoli il medesimo, et concludendo spesso, che il Papa vuol'essere la ruina di questa Religione...";



John was also redefining itself on many levels. One of these included exploring the spectrum of ways one could express a religious vocation within the Order, both male and female, lay or ordained. It was decided by members of the Order that this was best achieved by documenting cults of individuals within the Order who best exemplified this spectrum of vocations. One must immediately recognize the leading role that the historian of the Order, Giacomo Bosio, had in promoting Hospitaller models of sanctity. Bosio was an agent of the Order of St John in Rome, uncle of the famous Antonio Bosio, the 'Christopher Columbus' of subterranean Rome.<sup>825</sup> He was not a member of this organisation but his brother, Fra Giovanni Ottone Bosio, was not only a knight but served as Vice-Chancellor of the Order.

The role of an agent of the Order is relatively understudied.<sup>826</sup> Therefore, the completeness of the documentary evidence in this case study, as well as Bosio's success in his dual role of historian and diplomatic attaché, contribute to a better understanding of why and how the Order deployed agents and in what manner their role differed from that of the Order's ambassadors. Bosio was immensely respected for his scholarly acumen and had many powerful friends in both ecclesiastical and secular courts. His reputation as a historian was consistently linked with his services to the knights of Malta. In a sonnet dedicated to Bosio, part of a collection of works praising some of the most illustrious personalities of their time, Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) clearly expressed that his appreciation of Bosio was rooted in the historian's ability to immortalise those knights 'who seek death or victory, on sea or land, with their white crosses on a field of red.'<sup>827</sup>

In 1622, Giacomo Bosio published a second edition of *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione* Vol. I (first published in the Stamperia Apostolica Vaticana, 1594) along with a supplement of hagiographies taken from the same *Istoria*, entitled *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra*

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Buttigieg Emmanuel, "The Pope wants to be the ruin of this religion': the papacy, France, and the Order of St John in the seventeenth century," *Symposia Melitensia*, 2008, Vol.5, 73-84.

<sup>825</sup> Cecalupo, Chiara, *Antonio Bosio, La Roma Sotterranea e I Primi Collezionisti di Antichita' Cristiane*, Vol. 1 Profile Storico (Citta' del Vaticano: 2020).

<sup>826</sup> One exception is Chiara Cecalupo's monumental work on Antonio Bosio, nephew of Giacomo, also an agent of the Order. I am deeply grateful to Chiara for her valuable advice on research into the Bosio family and for sharing with me a copy of her work.

<sup>827</sup> Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [B.A.V.], Vat. lat., 46; '...Cercar morte, e vittoria in Mare, e'n Terra, con bianca Croce, e ser vermiglio il campo.' Published in Bosio, *Dell'Istoria*, Vol. 1 (Rome: 1594), prelim.

*Religione*.<sup>828</sup> Apart from this being the first complete cycle of hagiographies of saints of the Order of St John that has been catalogued, the 1622 edition of the history of the Order and the *Imagini de Beati e Santi* were the first ever to publish portraits of these individuals as a blueprint upon which others would be made. As the previous section described, this was no mean feat since the Order's saints could have easily been classified as *beati moderni* with all the implications mentioned above in the cases of Loyola, Neri, and Borromeo. None of them had been recognised by the newly established Congregation of Rites (1588), nor were they included in the first edition of the *Martirologium Romanum*,<sup>829</sup> Cesare Baronio's monumental work that sought to universalise medieval cults of saints. This is not surprising since the majority of Hospitaller saints were so localised in specific commanderies that most members within the Order itself were not even aware of their existence, let alone prayed to them.<sup>830</sup> Nevertheless, the Order argued that they were *beati ab immemorabili tempore*, meaning new candidates but with a long-established cult.<sup>831</sup> This kind of veneration, often called an 'equipollent canonization', was achieved through the publication of the images of these saints. Some of these portraits were reproductions of those found in the place of origin of that saint's cult, while others seem to have been already in the possession of the Order in Malta.<sup>832</sup> It would, therefore, be a mistake to think that Bosio's work was merely an exercise in history, since he would have published these works with greater ease had it been simply a history book. Giacomo Bosio's intent was to produce a work of *Historia Sacra*,<sup>833</sup> a bridge between history writing and devotion that reflected the Church's growing interest in its past as a tool for rebranding itself in the present.

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<sup>828</sup> Bosio, *Le Imagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*. (Rome: Facciotti, 1622).

<sup>829</sup> Cesare Baronio, *Martyrologium Romanum ad nova calendarii rationem...*(Venezia: 1583). On Baronio, see also: Machielsen, Jan. 'An Aspiring Saint and His Work: Cesare Baronio and the Success and Failure of the *Annales ecclesiastici* (1588–1607)', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters*, 2 (3) (2017), 233–287; *Cesare Baronio tra santità e scrittura storica*, Guazzelli, Michetti, Scorza Barcellona (eds.) (Roma, 2012).

<sup>830</sup>The archives in Casa Buonarroti, Florence, belonging to Fra Francesco Buonarroti shed light on how little these 'beati' were known outside their regional context. For example: ACB, V.110, f.66; f.72 shows the attempts by the Order to copy hagiographies and lists of miracles from regional documents.

<sup>831</sup> Ditchfield, *Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saint*, 209.

<sup>832</sup> Vella, Therese, *Splendour & Devotion: The Art Collections of the Order of St John* (Malta: Kite Group, 2023).

<sup>833</sup> On *Historia Sacra* see: Van Leire, Ditchfield and Louthan (eds.), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (Oxford, Oxford U.P. 2012); Luongo, Gennaro (ed.), *Erudizione e devozione, le Raccolte di Vite di santi in età moderna e 252ostras alute* (Roma: Viella, 2000).

Through a series of letters unearthed in three separate archives in Pistoia,<sup>834</sup> Florence and Malta, the efforts of the Order to prepare detailed dossiers on its medieval saints, to have them celebrated in its churches in Malta and abroad, has become much clearer. Bosio's papers are mixed in with those of a knight of Malta, Fra Carlo Aldobrandini who was a dignitary of the Order in Rome and a close friend of Giacomo Bosio. Aldobrandini was the executor of the testament of both Giacomo and his nephew Antonio Bosio, and in their name and according to their wishes, continued publishing the illustrated second edition of the *Dell'Istoria...* (1630).<sup>835</sup> Thanks to Carlo Aldobrandini's archive, it is possible to rebuild the process involved in preparing such a publication, such as the collection and collation of material. These letters bring to the fore several other knights who took the initiative to serve the Order, through roles they already occupied, thus challenging any understanding of a 'Rome calling' Tridentine devotion. The most interesting discovery that emerges from these letters is a more nuanced understanding of the role that the Grand Master had in promoting new devotions. From the letters of Grand Master Wignacourt, it becomes immediately apparent that he made extensive use of the pre-established Hospitaller networks, the commanderies and the various ambassadors and agents, to not only promote Hospitaller saints but also to collect, collate, and publish hagiographical material that would help in the canonisation process of Hospitaller candidates.

The majority of these letters date to the beginning of the seventeenth century, which roughly coincides with the time when Giacomo Bosio was preparing his second edition of *Della Istoria* and possibly adding a fourth volume to the series (continuing the chronicle from the year 1571).<sup>836</sup> Two letters from April 1616, one to the Receiver in Sicily Fra Valdina,<sup>837</sup> and another

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<sup>834</sup> I would like to thank Matteo Calcagni who first brought this private archive to my attention.

<sup>835</sup> Bosio, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Militia di San Giovanni...* Vol. II (Rome: 1630), dedication: "*Since this second volume...has not seen the light of day, since with its darkness death opposed it twice, first with the death of Giacomo Bosio the author, and then with the death of Antonio Bosio, agent of this Religion, and his nephew, whom he tasked with publishing it. To me befalls, as executor of the testament of the last departed, the task to right this wrong, and to satisfy the intention of both, it was my duty to make sure that it is finally printed....Rome, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1630, Fra Carlo Aldobrandini.*"

<sup>836</sup> Correspondence between Giacomo Bosio and his brother Frà Gio Otho Bosio who was residing in Malta, shows that he was keeping record of noteworthy events in Malta or those undertaken by the Order during Grand Master Wignacourt's magistracy, which indicates that he was possibly collecting information for a new volume. Aldobrandini Archives [Arch. Aldob.], MS 5.

<sup>837</sup> A.O.M. 1395, f.151r.

to the commander of Caltagirone Fra Giuseppe d'Inga,<sup>838</sup> showcase how Wignacourt commissioned Giacomo Bosio to publish a second edition of the history of the Order. This second edition had to include extended information on the saints of the Order, possibly even their imagery. Most of these saints of the Order had a cult that was particular to a city or town, typically in places where the Order of St John had a strong presence. Wignacourt showed particular interest in the fact that St Nicasius was celebrated since time immemorial in the small village of Caccamo, which indicates that he had an intimate knowledge of how the various Congregations of the Church operated.<sup>839</sup> Bosio opted to write directly to the knight commanders who had access to the documentation and shrines of these saints, asking them for evidence on the lives and cults of those individuals.

At the same time, Giacomo Bosio's brother Fra Giovanni Ottone was residing in Malta and regularly sent him updates and information from the *Convento* itself.<sup>840</sup> While the Aldobrandini archive in Pistoia conserves the received letters, some of the letters Bosio sent have been identified, scattered in private archives such as the Archivio Buonarroti in Florence, and in the main archive of the Order of St John in Valletta. This republic of letters<sup>841</sup> helps us reconstruct the world of saints in the early seventeenth-century Church and the process of writing *Vitae Sanctorum* on the lives of saints as a steppingstone in the process of validation of cults and liturgy. We shall first consider the circumstances that surrounded the publication of these images, as well as Bosio's intent of promoting new devotions within the Order of St John. Our focus will then shift to the manner in which these saints were portrayed and to what extent they were being refashioned according to Tridentine standards.

The first indication that Bosio's reprint of the *Dell'Istoria and Immagini de' Beati e Santi* was relevant to the authorisation of the cults of saints comes from an undated letter (written

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<sup>838</sup> A.O.M. 1395, f.151v.

<sup>839</sup> For a more detailed study, see: Papa, Giovanni, *Le Cause di Canonizzazione nel primo period della Congregazione dei Riti (1588-1634)* (Roma: Urbaniana University Press, 2001).

<sup>840</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS 5; examples include letters from Gio Otho from October 1622 and March 1624.

<sup>841</sup> For similar case-studies on the circulation of letters and resulting production of scholarly works in the early modern period, see: *The Reach of the Republic of Letters, Literacy and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2 vols.), van Dixhoorn, Arjan and Speakman Sutch, Susie (eds.), (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008); *Erudition and the Republic of Letters*, Brill Journal (2016-2022).

sometime in the early 1620s) by two Provençal knights to Wignacourt. These knights referred to a:

‘verification and addition to the number of martyrs and blessed of our Religion [the Order of St John] in accordance with a licence obtained from the Holy see during the happy magistracy of Your Highness [Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, d.1622], as evidenced by the attached petition presented to His Holiness the Pope by master Iacomo Bosio, historian of our Religion...’.<sup>842</sup>

Fra Balthazar D’Agoult and Fra Jean de Mons-Savasse were proposing the addition of Commander Charles Rochechinard<sup>843</sup> and the nun Galiotte Genouillac to the process of ‘*verification and addition to number of martyrs and blessed of the Religion.*’<sup>844</sup> A manuscript biography of Sister Galiotte survives in the archive as well,<sup>845</sup> however, these two candidates did not make the cut, presumably because they could not satisfy the antiquity clause. On the other hand, the *langue* of Italy was by far more coordinated and more successful in obtaining ancient hagiographies and documents on miracles and relics for Bosio. Yet before delving into the specifics of this case, it is worth focusing on the reference to a ‘verification and addition’ of saints.

Bosio had been collecting old hagiographies on the saints of the Order for well over two decades, but the true link with liturgical practices emerges in his activities between 1618 and 1620. We know this from Bosio’s correspondence with Fra Francesco dell’Antella,<sup>846</sup> Commander of San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini in Florence.<sup>847</sup> This evidence concerned

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<sup>842</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS. 17, f.250. The volume is marked 1642, however, this was possibly done by Fra Carlo Aldobrandini who collated and bound the material after Giacomo Bosio’s death.

<sup>843</sup> On Prior Rochechinard see: Guido, Sante, ‘Suppellettili sacri da Rodi a Malta per Cavalieri Gerosolimitani. Sopravvivenze e riuso: le quindici statue d’argento EX DONO VENERANDI PRIORIS SANCTI AECIDII fra’ Charles Allemand de Rochechinard.’ In *Tribute to Alain Blondy*, Azzopardi, Busuttil, Darmanin (eds.) (Valletta: 2017), 183-212.

<sup>844</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS 17, f.250; ‘*Il Gran Commendatore e li Procuratori sottoscritti della Ven. Lingue di Provenza havendo presentito doversi far una verificatione et ampliatione del numero del Santi Martiri e Beati di Nostra Sacra Religione conforme alla licenza ottenuta dalla Santa Sede Apostolica nel felicissimo magisterio di V. A. Come appare nell’inclusa supplica che ne fu data alla Santita del Papa dal mag. Iacomo Bosio Istoriografo di Nra. Religione aiutato e favorito dalla bona merita del S. Commendator Fra Don Geronimo di Guevara Ambasciatore ordinario di V. A. Nella corte Romana...*’

<sup>845</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS 5, no foliation.

<sup>846</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS. 17, no foliation.

<sup>847</sup> Sebregondi Fiorentini, Ludovica, *San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini a Firenze. Percorsi storici dai Templari all’Ordine di Malta all’era moderna* (Firenze: Edifir, 2005).

specifically the location of bodily remains and miracles attributed to them, information that had to be presented to the Congregation of Rites as part of the authorisation of cults. Dell'Antella,<sup>848</sup> a wealthy and well-connected individual within the Order, is the first piece in our puzzle of knights, scholars, cardinals, and their networks. The second piece of the puzzle is a common acquaintance of dell'Antella and Bosio, Fra Giocondo Accarigi, who was also mentioned in the letter as acting as a sort of middleman between Bosio and dell'Antella.<sup>849</sup> Accarigi (or Accariggi), a knight from Siena,<sup>850</sup> seems to have helped Bosio collect the required information. Bosio credited him as bringing to his attention the cult of Blessed Gherland of Poland, extant in Alicata, Sicily.<sup>851</sup>

The subject of this letter, however, was another saint, Pietro da Imola (Pietro Pattarini). Having discovered through Accarigi that Bosio wanted to publish images of saints in the new editions of the history of the Order, dell'Antella sent the historian a beautiful, coloured drawing of the effigy of this saint, complete with some information on the 300 cult that had existed in the Order's church of San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini, Florence. Francesco dell'Antella told Bosio that the body of this saint was translated to beneath the main altar of the church following a miracle: 'a hand was seen protruding from the grave and held a long ladder that was resting against a wall, as it was slipping with on top of it a man who was decorating the church on the occasion of the feast of St James'.<sup>852</sup> (Fig. 41) The knight commander informed Bosio that he had commissioned a new altar which was open from the front to allow pilgrims to see the case where the body was kept through a brass grid and glass.<sup>853</sup> The main striking feature of this letter is the importance that was given to the continuity of the cult of this saint, notably in the references to the antiquity of the cult and the fact that the presence of the relics still attracted many devotees.

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<sup>848</sup> Suffice to say that he was one of Caravaggio's patrons and paid for the *Sleeping Cupid*. He had his own portrait painted by Justus Sustermans in 1620-22: Stone, David M., 'Signature Killer: Caravaggio and the Poetics of Blood' *Art Bulletin*, Volume XCIV n.4, (December 2012), 574.

<sup>849</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 7, f.408, 14 July 1618.

<sup>850</sup> Dal Pozzo, *Ruolo*, 146-147; joined the Order in July 1582.

<sup>851</sup> Bosio, *Dell'Istoria* Vol. I (1621), 621.

<sup>852</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 7, f.408; 'le cui ossa si dice per traditione antica ci fece scavati da quel luogo, e trasportati sotto l'altar maggiore in occasione d'un miracolo che fu veduto un braccio uscire fuori dalla tomba, e ritenere una lunga a piedi che appoggiata al mura scivolova e cadeva mantra v'era sopra una che per ler festivita di Santo Jacopo parava la Chiesa

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*, '...collocarla in mezzo della Tribuna come s'usa modernamente, ho advenato molto piu la detta cassa e ripostarla in modo che si vede, ch' s'adora per li vetro e per una graticola d'orata il corpo del Beato.'



*Figure 41: The Miracle of B. Pietro da Imola (Neapolitan School, first-half of the eighteenth century?), Inquisitor's Palace, Vittoriosa [Courtesy - Heritage Malta]*

The other hagiography that Bosio and Giocondo Accarigi had worked together on that same year was that of Blessed Gherland of Poland. The case of this saint is particular as it seemed that neither Bosio nor Wignacourt were aware of his existence and became informed of him by Accarigi.<sup>854</sup> In other words, not only was the cult of this saint a local one, but the very

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<sup>854</sup> Bosio, *De Beati e Santi*, 83.



hagiography was being compiled in order to disseminate his cult amongst the Hospitallers themselves. The reason for Gherland's obscurity results from the uncertainty as to whether he was a Hospitaller or a Templar, particularly since his body was miraculously rediscovered, buried in the Church of Our Lady of the Temple (Santa Maria del Tempio) outside Caltagirone after the original location had been forgotten. The doubt regarding whether he was a Hospitaller saint stems from the fact that Gherland died before the Templar suppression. Hence, when he was buried inside the Church of Our Lady of the Temple, the church was still in Templar control. Taking a closer look at how this matter was resolved allows us to understand better the selection process of saints and how the coordination of the Italian knights with the Italian historian(s) resulted in a greater representation of Italian cults.

The linchpin in this network was Fra Francesco Buonarroti, whose collection of *Terra Sigillata Medals* featuring Hospitaller saints introduces us to the promotion of Bosio's *Beati e Santi*. At the time of his writing of these letters (ca. 1616-1623), Fra Buonarroti occupied the important role of secretary for the *langue* of Italy. If we had to consider the Grand Master's personal piety as the primary mover in this project, the *langues* were the only ones who could truly



Figure 42: Blessed Gherland, *Terra Sigillata Melitensis* (early seventeenth century), Collezione Buonarroti, Courtesy - Casa Museo Buonarroti, Florence



mobilise individual knights to satisfy this request, thus showing the centrality of the secretary, the langue's chief bureaucrat, to the success of the enterprise. For reasons that are yet unclear, Fra Francesco Buonarroti, who was residing in Malta, sent copies of some of these documents concerning Italian saints to his brother Michelangelo in Florence. Francesco died soon after. Consequently, these documents remained a family heirloom, to this day conserved in the Buonarroti house in Florence. It is thanks to Buonarroti's indiscretion that it has become easier to appreciate how central the *langues* were as semi-autonomous administrative bodies within the Order, a case in point being the advancement of the liturgies of saints.

Returning to the case of Blessed Gherland of Poland,<sup>855</sup> the Buonarroti documents bring to the fore two historians/hagiographers working together, which is already an indication of the zeal for identifying saints that was prevalent in the Catholic Church at the start of the seventeenth century. Along with Giacomo Bosio, the Sicilian Jesuit Ottavio Gaetani (1566-1620) was trying to collect information on Blessed Gherland so that he could include him in his *Vitae Sanctorum Sicolorum*. Unfortunately, Gaetani died before he could publish this book, which was only published in 1657.<sup>856</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that Gaetani had managed to identify an earlier hagiography of Blessed Gherland, which he included in his 1617 volume *Idea Operis de Vitae Sanctorum Sicolorum*, which was a sort of bibliography of texts on Sicilian saints that would later form the basis of the *Vitae Sanctorum*. Among these, he mentioned a volume *Inventio et miracula B. Gherlandi Equitis ex militari Ordine Templariorum (Discovery and miracles of Blessed Gherland knight of the military Order of the Temple)*.<sup>857</sup>

This would explain why this saint was previously overlooked by anyone interested in Hospitaller saints. Still, upon the insistence of the above-mentioned Fra Giocondo Accarigi, and another knight who like Accarigi was based in Sicily – Fra Alessandro Benci, Commander of the Hospitaller properties in Caltagirone – an attempt was made by the knights of Malta to

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<sup>855</sup> He was sometimes referred to as Gherland of Germany. The inconsistencies in his name already indicate how little the Order's hagiographers knew about the saints' origins.

<sup>856</sup> Gaetani, Ottavio, *Vitae Sanctorum Sicolorum, ex antiquis graecis latinisque monumentis...* (Palermo: 1657). It was posthumously published by the fellow Jesuit Don Pietro Salerno.

<sup>857</sup> As Gaetani has only included the title in his bibliographic work, with no indication of author, date, or place of publication, I have thus far been unable to trace this work.

'adopt' Gherland as a saint of their Order. In the absence of membership records from the time of Gherland (end of the thirteenth century), the Buonarroti correspondence illustrates how an image of the saint made up for the lack of documentation. The first step was to categorically rule out that Gherland died a Templar. In an undated and unsigned '*notitia*' sent to Fra Francesco Buonarroti, reference is made to the fact that Giacomo Bosio had written about the suppression of the Templars in 1308, and the transfer of all their properties to the Order of St John in 1312.<sup>858</sup> Bosio conveniently omitted to give the date of Gherland's burial, writing only that it took 84 years for his relics to be rediscovered,<sup>859</sup> and that the *inventio* took place in 1327,<sup>860</sup> decades before Santa Maria del Tempio was transferred to the Hospitallers.

Aside from the ambiguity with dates, according to Bosio, the indisputable evidence that Gherland was a knight of St John comes from an old image that was kept in the Church of St James in Caltagirone, the final resting place of the saint's remains following the *translatio* of the body from Santa Maria del Tempio. In this painting, Gherland was represented wearing a black cape with a white, eight-pointed cross on both the cape and hanging from a chain he had around his neck.<sup>861</sup> The imagery of these saints will be discussed in more detail further on. However, just by comparing the case of S. Pietro da Imola and that of Blessed Gherland, one notices the centrality of images and why it was so important for Bosio to publish an illustrated version of the hagiographies. To complicate matters, Bosio added that Blessed Gherland was 'called by everyone saint',<sup>862</sup> a reminder that before the reform in the beatification process, 'beato' was just as much an adjective as it was a title.

The second part of Gherland's hagiography was dedicated to information concerning the proof of his miracles, the feast and the antiquity of his cult. Grand Master Wignacourt discovered that the city of Caltagirone used to commemorate the feast of Blessed Gherland on 18 June, the day when the *translatio* took place. Wignacourt likely obtained this

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<sup>858</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 110, f.72; *Notitia della vita e miracoli del Beato Gherlando dell'Ordine nostro per la Historia della Religione*: 'Nella Istoria della Religione vol. Primo parte secondo a fol. 14 nello anno 1308 si legge il miserando fine della Religione de Templari la quale duro ceno e novanta anni...si vede come l'anno 1312 con Bolla spedita in Vienna adi 8 di Novembre, doppo essere la detta Religione stata soppressa et estinta da Papa Clemente quinto...'

<sup>859</sup> Bosio, *De Beati e Santi*, 78.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>861</sup> Bosio, *Imagini de' Beati e Santi*, 85.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 43: Medieval anthropomorphic reliquary with relic of the head of B. Gherland, Church of St James, Caltagirone

information from Fra Alessandro Benci, who amongst other roles also served as his personal secretary.<sup>863</sup> Despite the long tradition of Blessed Gherland in Caltagirone, including medieval

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<sup>863</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol.110, f.72, *'Notitia della vita e miracoli del Beato Gherlando dell'ordine nostro per la Historie della Religione: "Et per una lettera scritta di Caltagirone adi 12 Novembre 1618 dal Sig. Don Francesco Paterno Barone di Rumione et Patrizio di detta Citta, a Fra Alessandro Benci Commendatore di quella Commenda appare come per rivelazione di Santo Costantino, fu ritrovato il corpo del Beato Girlando d'Alemagna nella Chiesa del Tempo che e nella più alta parte del feogo di detta commenda. L'anno 1327 fu*

reliquaries with his relics, (*Fig. 43*) the feast was prohibited by the Bishop of Syracuse Giovanni Orosco de Arzes (1562-1574), who did not find sufficient proof demonstrating sanctity. Benci told Wignacourt that the jurats of Caltagirone kept a volume with 95 old testimonies that could definitively legitimatise the cult of Blessed Gherland. Bosio wrote that in 1616, Wignacourt asked Fra Giuseppe de Inga, a knight from Caltagirone (possibly having connections in the town council) to request an authenticated copy of this volume.<sup>864</sup> The town council was not only happy to provide this copy, but they also reopened the investigation into some of these testimonies, specifically into nine from the oldest and most trustworthy sources. All the while, Giacomo Bosio was collecting new hagiographic material for his publications.<sup>865</sup>

Nonetheless, until 1619, Benci's efforts to have the feast of Blessed Gherland reinstated had not given results. Having discovered that Bosio was close to publishing the new edition of his histories, Fra Accarigi, Fra Buonarroto and Fra Benci himself came together to locate irrefutable documentation that showed that the cult of Gherland of Poland had indeed been endorsed by the Church. They had heard from a certain Francesco Paternò, a Sicilian nobleman, that the Jesuit hagiographer Ottavio Gaetano (Caetani), who as mentioned above was writing his *Vitae Sanctorum Sicolorum* concurrently with Bosio, had in his possession an old ecclesiastical Bull to that effect.<sup>866</sup> The Order was willing to pay 50 scudi to obtain this Bull, which would have compelled the contemporary Bishop of Syracuse to reinstate the feast. Gaetano wrote to Bosio on 17 May 1619, when Bosio was nearing the end of his work.<sup>867</sup> Unfortunately, he did not have the decree that they were looking for but told Bosio that he had another set of testimonies that had been seen and approved by the Bishop of Girgenti [Agrigento] on behalf of the Bishop of Syracuse. Gaetano believed that the fact that these had already been studied and approved by someone in the Church hierarchy provided enough justification to ask Rome directly to reinstate the saint and allow the printing of his image. An

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*transportato in Caltagirone nella Chiesa di San Iacopo, et fece più di cento Miracoli insigni, come si vede per il Processo che si conserva in detta Città.'*

<sup>864</sup> Bosio, *Beati e Santi*, 84.

<sup>865</sup> Bosio, *Beati e Santi*, 81.

<sup>866</sup> Arch. Buonarroto, Vol. 110, f.66, 29 March 1619, copy of a letter signed by 'Jacomo Bosio' and f.71, unsigned letter marked 'Malta 30<sup>th</sup> April' [1619?] which indicates that the sender was probably Alessandro Benci.

<sup>867</sup> Bosio and Benci managed to make contact with Gaetano through a common acquaintance, Fra Emanuel Dantas, *cappellan maior* of the Spanish troops in Sicily.

authentic copy of these testimonies was preserved by Buonarroti along with copies of the correspondence.<sup>868</sup>



Figure 44: Tomb of Giacinto Petronio, Ex Convento di San Domenico Molfetta, ca. 1646 (Catalogo Beni Culturali, Cod: 1600006530)

Giacomo Bosio must have written tens if not hundreds of letters similar to the ones mentioned above, some of which are still waiting to be discovered. The fact that the Order had been in existence for a number of centuries, during which time it had accumulated properties and recruited members from every corner of the continent, places the institution in an ideal position to unearth stories of sanctity. As we have seen, this fact also allowed the order to use pre-established networks and friendships to collect the relevant documentation.<sup>869</sup> However, this constitutes only two of three steps necessary in the process of canonisation, the third being *vox hierarchiae*, the central role that the Holy See had in regulating devotions.

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<sup>868</sup> Arch. Buonarroti, Vol. 110, f.70; 17 May 1619.

<sup>869</sup> On the Order's networks, see: Grech, Ivan, 'Percezioni di isolamento nel Mediterraneo: Malta nel '600, canali di comunicazione e circolazione di notizie', *Making waves in the Mediterranean*, D'Angelo, Harlaftis, Vassallo (eds.) (Messina: Istituto di Studi Storici Gaetano Salvemini, 2006), 457-467.

By the end of 1619, Bosio had collected the evidence that he needed and submitted the final manuscript complete with images of the saints to the *Maestro del Sacro Palazzo*. The *Maestro del Palazzo* was a high official of the Papal court, traditionally a Dominican who also served as the Pope's theologian. Occupying this role in 1619 was a protégé of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, Don Giacinto Petroni (1580-1648), (*Fig.44*) described by Bosio as being 'a very scrupulous and difficult man'.<sup>870</sup> On 14 December 1619, Bosio wrote to Grand Master Wignacourt to tell him that after all the travails of obtaining the images, the Master of the Palace refused to give him authorisation to print them, telling him that 'it is not customary to print images of saints who are not canonized, that is, who are not included in the Martirologium [Romanum]'.<sup>871</sup> Within the Roman Curia, an internal bureaucratic battle was also ensuing between the *Mastro del Sacro Palazzo* and the Congregation of the Index as to who would have the prerogative of censorship.<sup>872</sup> Petronio's goal was to assert the authority of the Pope's theologian above that of the Index, and in many ways, Bosio's book was caught in the crossfire.

Disappointed by this rejection, Bosio wrote back to the Order, who mobilised its contacts in Rome once more to help. It transpired that Grand Master Wignacourt was able to go straight to Cardinal Borghese,<sup>873</sup> who simply asked Don Petroni to facilitate the process. Incidentally, Bosio had also been in contact with Cardinal Borghese's chamberlain, another knight of Malta by the name of Fra Vincenzo Averoldo, and the Order's ambassador in Rome Fra Gerolamo Guevara. The latter prepared a 'defence' of the case to present directly to the Pope.<sup>874</sup> The first point raised by Guevara was that the Apostolic Press had already published the lives of these saints 25 [sic] years prior (referring to the first edition of Bosio's histories) and that at the time, the contents of the volumes had been vetted by the appropriate Congregation of Cardinals (presumably referring to the Congregation of the Index). As for the addition of the images, Guevara retorted that:

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<sup>870</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS 17, f.251; 28 Dec. 1619.

<sup>871</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.253; 14 December 1619.

<sup>872</sup> Treccani Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Petroni Giacino [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giacinto-petroni\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giacinto-petroni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) [downloaded on 5/5/23];

<sup>873</sup> Apart from being Giacinto Petroni's patron, Cardinal Borghese was one of the most powerful people in Rome, being the nephew of Pope Paul V and the Secretary of State for the Holy See.

<sup>874</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.254.

‘These are not modern saints, or invented by a particular affection or recent ambition, but [their cults] are four or five-hundred years old. In those times, the Holy Apostolic See had not yet reserved for itself the authority to declare saints, nor taken it away from bishops, as was the practice in Dioceses. These saints have done stupendous miracles, reviving the dead, drew water from dry rocks, turned water into wine, commanded the wind and quelled the sea, gave light to the blind, healed the sick and banished Demons, and many more similar miracles of the highest order. In their honour, Churches were built, and altars constructed, and on them mass is regularly celebrated; their particular liturgy is recited in cities, such as the diocese of Genoa, Pisa, Florence and others. To these Churches and altars, many Popes have conceded Indulgences, notably Urban V, Innocent IV, Alexander IV and lately Sixtus V.’<sup>875</sup>

As for the matter of these saints not being in the *Martirologium Romanum*, Guevara argued that it would have been virtually impossible for its author Cesare Baronio to include all the saints that are in heaven. He pointed out that despite the Order’s long service to the Church, including countless who shed their blood, not one Hospitaller is to be found in the *Martirologium*. He concluded by writing that ‘At this point, it is not a matter of canonizing them anew, but only to narrate their stories for historical purposes, so as to move the readers to imitate them in good deeds, in the praise of God and the wellbeing of souls...’<sup>876</sup>

Whether it was because of Fra Gerolamo Guevara’s convincing argument, or through papal court politics that the Congregation of Rites authorised the reprinting of Bosio’s work, we may never know. The matter was summarily resolved before Christmas of 1619,<sup>877</sup> as confirmed by congratulatory letters from Wignacourt to Guevara,<sup>878</sup> Averoldo,<sup>879</sup> and Bosio.<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.254.

<sup>876</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid.*, f.256; 21 December 1619.

<sup>878</sup> A.O.M., 1399; 10 February 1620.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*; 28 March 1620.

<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*

Having made many enemies, Giacinto Petroni lost his position soon after the death of Paul V in 1621. He was nominated bishop of Molfetta and despite pleading twice with Scipione Borghese to intercede for him with Gregory XV and then with Urban VIII, he never managed to return to Rome.<sup>881</sup>

It should not come as a surprise that the involvement of Tuscan knights in publishing the *Imagini de Beati e Santi* resulted in a heavy Tuscan undertone to the whole enterprise: from the commander of Florence Fra Francesco dell'Antella<sup>882</sup> to his friend from Siena Fra Giocondo Accarigi,<sup>883</sup> and the Pisan Fra Ottavio Cevoli,<sup>884</sup> as well as Bosio's own host in Rome Fra Carlo Aldobrandini who was also Florentine. No less than three of eleven saints (Ubaldesca, Pietro da Imola, Gherardo Mecatti) published in the 1622 edition, had cults located in Tuscany. These knights, along with Fra Benci and others, were essentially Giacomo Bosio's research group. He relied extensively on the information they supplied, but especially on the images of the saints they sent him. Fra Antella's watercolour copy of the tomb of Blessed Pietro da Imola in the Florentine church of San Jacopo Campo Corbolini survives among the Bosio papers and was reproduced in the *Beati e Santi* exactly as Dell'Antella drew it.<sup>885</sup> Fra Cevoli obtained two images of St Ubaldesca and some old hagiographies, which he sent to Dell'Antella who in turn forwarded them to Bosio. The likeness of Beato Gherardo Mecatti from Villamagna, a few miles from Florence, was also obtained through Dell'Antella. Bosio duly acknowledged them as sources in his *Beati e Santi*.<sup>886</sup>

In matters of devotionality and spirituality, the bigger picture differs considerably from the tug-of-war that often characterised the legal, administrative, and diplomatic activities of the

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<sup>881</sup> Treccani, Petroni Giacinto.

<sup>882</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.408-412, 14 luglio 1618: *Lettera Originale dell'Comm. Fra Francesco dell'Antella per verificare il Beato Pietro da Imola che si trova in Campo Corbolini di Firenze*; Arch. Aldob. MS7, no pag. *Informationi della vita e Miracoli di Santa Ubaldesca Monaca dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano mandatami dal Sr Commendatore Fra Francesco dell'Antella per servizio dell'Istoria.*

<sup>883</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.408-412, 14 July 1618: *'Havendomi detto il Comm. Accarigi che e stato qui da me alcuni giorni che V.S. vuol far ristampare, con alcune aggiunti, la prima e seconda parte delle storie di Nra. Religione...'*

<sup>884</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS7, no pag. *Informationi della vita e Miracoli di Santa Ubaldesca Monaca dell'Ordine di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano mandatami dal Sr Commendatore Fra Francesco dell'Antella per servizio dell'Istoria.* (The original information was prepared by Ottavio Cevoli and then forwarded by dell'Antella to Bosio.)

<sup>885</sup> Arch. Aldob., MS 17, f.408-412.

<sup>886</sup> Bosio, *Beati e Santi*, 75, 86.



Order. It would be a mistake to think of the Order's spirituality in terms of its many jurisdictional battles with the Diocese or the Papal Nuncio. Equally, it would be incorrect to present the Order's relationship with the Roman Curia as the latter being solely the arbiter of the former's many squabbles with other religious entities on the island and elsewhere. It is important to think less of individual Hospitallers as being passive receivers of instructions from above, and more of them acting as agents in a complex network, each playing a specific role that affected the manner in which spirituality was perceived and devotionality was expressed. Even more importantly, Tridentinism in devotional patterns is not expressed along the 'broadcaster-receiver' model, whereby Rome dictated, and the peripheries followed,<sup>887</sup> but rather it is more accurate to consider the Roman Curia's post-Trent Congregations as tools to sanction and promote local devotions on a wider scale were deemed fit. The Papacy was the Order's biggest ally when it came to preserving what was particular for Hospitaller liturgy. 'Canonization — in the broad sense of authenticating holiness — involved negotiating between the varying interests of local, regional, national, and universal Catholicisms'.<sup>888</sup> Universality in this case does not translate to how Rome influenced the local reality, but rather how the local reacts, contradicts, draws from, or uses what the Church proposes.

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<sup>887</sup> The inadequacy of the top-down model of liturgical reform is discussed in Ditchfield, Simon 'Tridentine worship and the cult of saints', *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 6 Reform and Expansion 1500-1660*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007), 201-224; see also Ditchfield, Simon 'Rome calling? Rewriting the Catholic Reformation for the 21st century' in Matteo Al-Kalak, Lorenzo Ferrari & Elena Fumagalli eds., *La crisi della modernità: studi in onore di Gianvittorio Signorotto*, (Rome: Viella, 2023), 305-328.

<sup>888</sup> Olds, 'Ambiguities of the Holy', 137.

### *Images for imitation*

When writing about Pietro Maria Campi (1569-1649), who was a contemporary of Bosio, Simon Ditchfield remarked that the need to 'save the phenomena' of local saints' cults between ca. 1550-1700 contributed to a sheer quantity of works of sacred erudition. Bosio, therefore, was not an exception.<sup>889</sup> Like Campi, Bosio could be considered 'a local Baronio', as he sought to justify or in some cases reinstate Hospitaller devotions in terms that were acceptable to Rome by providing evidence of continuity, which, in spite of the historical limitations of such a practice, it does demonstrate a fair degree of scholarly sophistication.<sup>890</sup> On the other hand, as an agent of the institution, the desire for the preservation of the particular did not originate from Bosio directly but from the enthusiasm of individual members on whose behalf he acted.

These individuals were eager to preserve the memory and reinforce it with liturgy where possible; an enterprise that clearly revolved around the production of images of those saints. One must keep in mind that Bosio had already published the *vitae* of some saints in his first edition of the *Dell'Istoria*<sup>891</sup> during Verdalle's magistracy, though admittedly they were somewhat tucked away in a work that was predominantly historical rather than hagiographical. As the name implies, the companion volume to his three-volume *Dell'Istoria Gerosolomitano*, placing the stress on the *imagini* (images) and not the *vitae* (lives). Wignacourt wanted real-life exemplars that the knight, nun, or chaplain could look at rather than imagine. Thus, the choices of saints and blessed presented by Bosio, and a further two candidates added in a subsequent 1633 edition of *Le Imagini de Beati e Santi* by Francesco Truglio,<sup>892</sup> represent not only individuals that would be agreeable to Rome but more importantly, ones that would be agreeable to the Grand Master and his knights. Despite this

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<sup>889</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy, Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), 12.

<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>891</sup> Bosio, Giacomo, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill.ma Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano, Parte Prima* (Roma, Stamperia Apostolica Vaticana, 1594).

<sup>892</sup> *Le Imagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione...* (Ristampata in Palermo: Decio Cirillo, 1633). In honour of Fra Carlo Aldobrandini, Bosio's testamentary executor.

particular requirement, the images themselves were also a product of the spirit of their age: of *beati moderni*. Throughout the following sections, we will take a closer look at the artistic expressions of the many interpretations of the Order's vocation in the context of the rampant production of saintly images.

Both Ambassador Guevara and Giacomo Bosio wrote on numerous occasions that they believed in using traditional saints to present contemporary values:

*'...through the example of these saints, may the Holy Spirit ignite the desire [in the hearts of members of the Order] to imitate the actions, the virtues and for them to carry around this small book which, like a mirror and a continuous testament, would motivate them to charitable actions.'*<sup>893</sup>

Even though the strategy of using imagery to instil devotion predated Trent, as did arguments on its correct use, the second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in the application of art as a tool for meditation, as we have seen with the Jesuit emblematisers. Bar some exceptions, such as Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso Intorno alle Imagini Sacre et Profane* (1582) which emphasised the need to regulate the use of visual arts to complement contemporary doctrine,<sup>894</sup> the conclusions of the Council of Trent on the production of sacred art was relatively ambiguous in the first decades following the Council's conclusion. As a consequence, regulating visual arts proved more complicated than initially envisaged, in part because reaching a consensus on how to properly acknowledge saintly men and women without anticipating legal canonisation became increasingly more difficult.<sup>895</sup> Although the Order's agents do not make a direct reference to certain incidents, particularly those that occurred under the pontificate of Clement VIII (1592–1605),<sup>896</sup> certain arguments are very

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<sup>893</sup> Bosio, *Beati e Santi*, 5 : *'...[lo] Spirito Santo, d'accendere con l'esempio di questi Santi, un'ardente desiderio d'imitare le degne attione, e l'eccellenti Virtù loro...questo piccolo libricciulo ; quasi come uno specchio, e Memoriale continuouo, che gli ecciti, e spinga al ben'operare.'*

<sup>894</sup> Cattoi e Primerano (eds.), *Arte e Persuasione : La strategia delle immagini dopo il Concilio di Trento*. (Trento : Museo Diocesano di Trento, 2014), 148-151 ; Paleotti, Gabriele, *Discorso Intorno alle Imagini Sacre et Profane*. (Bologna, 1582).

<sup>895</sup> See: De Boer, Wietse, *Art in Dispute, Catholic Debates at the Time of Trent with an Edition and Translation of Key Documents* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022).

<sup>896</sup> Noyes, Ruth S., 'On the Fringes of Center: Disputed Hagiographic Imagery and the Crisis over the Beati moderni in Rome ca. 1600', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 64 no.3 (Fall 2011), 804.

reminiscent of that heated debate between major exponents of the Church like Antonio Gallonio<sup>897</sup> and Roberto Bellarmino in the years leading up to the canonisation of Counter-Reformation heroes like Neri and Loyola.

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, Jesuits and Oratorians in particular started producing images of their spiritual fathers, creating special devotions around the burial places or shrines of these individuals and practicing liturgical rituals that were generally reserved for canonised saints.<sup>898</sup> There was undoubtedly a link in the minds of those promoting these practices, between the pictures, the cult, and the cause of a candidate's sainthood. A polemic arose because these practices were not only being promoted by major exponents of the Church in Rome, but they also proved to be very popular and advanced the *fama sanctitatis* of those candidates. Bosio's efforts, albeit two decades later, show how the problem of 'the right of the saint to be depicted'<sup>899</sup> had not really been resolved. It also shows that the initial refusal by the *Maestro del Sacro Palazzo* to allow Bosio to print was not an isolated incident without precedent, but rather illustrates the ever-growing fears of the Roman Curia that *bona fide* intentions to promote localised religious reform could potentially turn out to be provoking, if not outright subversive to Roman reform. Bosio made his request to publish towards the end of a period when papal policies and bureaucracy oscillated unpredictably; luckily for the Order in 1620, the decision swayed in their favour. Not the same could be said for the Oratorians and Jesuits who in 1602 saw their position shift from being pioneers in the field of *Beati moderni* to

'virtual outsiders in the territory that they had unwittingly helped circumscribe. The papal reprimand took place in 1602,<sup>900</sup> concerning the veneration of Philip Neri and Ignatius Loyola as saints in all but name. The sharpest Jesuit and Oratorian minds pushed back against Curial censorship by producing several apologetical works to justify the veneration of their heroes

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<sup>897</sup> With reference to *De his quae prestari possunt non canonizatis ad Augustinum Cusanum Cardinalem amplissimi auctore Antonio Gallonio* (1596), see: Ditchfield, 'Coping with the Beati Moderni', 427.

<sup>898</sup> Noyes, 800-846; Tutino (2022), 151-178.

<sup>899</sup> Simon Ditchfield, 'How not to be a Counter-Reformation Saint: The attempted Canonization of Pope Gregory X, 1622-45' in *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992), 381.

<sup>900</sup> Incidentally in 1602, Bosio finished and published the third volume of his history of the Order, commissioned by Grand Master Wignacourt.

in the face of canonical ambiguities.<sup>901</sup> The Oratorians and Jesuits, among other religious communities, found that in order to preserve the cults of their beloved spiritual fathers they had to suppress the very cultic manifestations that had generated them.<sup>902</sup>

The roles played by the key protagonists in this incident which resulted in a papal reprimand are uncannily similar to an incident with Bosio a few years later, involving Pope Clement VIII and his cardinal nephew (Pietro Aldobrandini), the *Maestro del Sacro Palazzo*, founders and heroes of religious Orders, their hagiographers (such as Baronio and Gallonio), the Superior General of the respective Orders (Claudio Aquaviva) and the artists. Although in the case of the Order of St John the individuals occupying the key roles change, there is a certain overlap. Not only would Bosio (who was residing in Rome at the time) have been aware of the scandal that arose when the Jesuits and Oratorians started printing *vita et miracula* of their spiritual fathers (a holy image of the saint surrounded by small cartouches showing scenes from his life and his miracles), but some people involved were close friends and collaborators of Giacomo Bosio himself, notably one of the artists responsible for the creation of these holy images, Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630).<sup>903</sup> Bosio was one of Tempesta's patrons, so much so that the artist had designed the frontispiece of the first edition of Bosio's history of the Order. Although we do not know whether the second edition, including the saints of the Order, was also based on Tempesta, some of Tempesta's most important works were dedicated to Giacomo Bosio, chief among them his map of Rome (1593) and his *Serie dei Cesari* (1596), both printed in Rome. It is entirely possible that Bosio, who was likewise in Rome at the time, was closely following the unfolding of the *beati moderni* situation in 1602 through his many contacts, Tempesta being one of them.

The context of canonisation of polemics puts the argument presented by the Order to the Pope into perspective, with the main points that Fra Girolamo Guevara made reflecting closely the rhetoric exemplified by Bellarmino and Gallonio in a document they jointly penned

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<sup>901</sup> Noyes, 804; Simon Ditchfield, 'Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World' in *Critical Inquiry* 35.3 (2009), 578: 'the symbiotic relationship between...canonisation and censorship, saint and heretic making.'

<sup>902</sup> Noyes, 806.

<sup>903</sup> Tempesta usually did the design, and the plate would be entrusted to a separate artist. In 1600 Tempesta designed Filippo Neri e La Madonna di Vallicella, surrounded by miracles, executed by Pietro Coel – Rome Archivio della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di San Filippo Neri.

in 1602. For instance, a great deal was made concerning the creation of new art featuring recently deceased individuals. To avoid encountering the same trouble that his predecessors had, Bosio made certain to clarify that he was reproducing existing art in his etchings, i.e., old art.<sup>904</sup> Continuity of an old Church tradition was one of the central themes in Bellarmino and Gallonio's retort to the Papal prohibition. They argued that the Church had allowed semi-private devotions of non-canonised saints based solely on the *fama sanctitatis*, and hence this material and immaterial tradition also justified the production of imagery.<sup>905</sup> Earlier that same year, Gallonio had already written on the subject in his *An liceat imagines*,<sup>906</sup> highlighting a number of such instances in Rome itself as well as in other major Italian dioceses where non-canonised saints were portrayed with a nimbus and placed on or near altars.

As for printed images, it seems that subversion of the papal authority came directly from high-ranking cardinals, including the famous author of the *Martyrologium*, Cesare Baronio himself, who not only owned such images of Ignatius Loyola but was allegedly using them to promote devotion towards the candidate.<sup>907</sup> Even more polemical were prints of the genre *Vita et Miracula*, featuring insets with scenes from the life of miracles around the central portrait. The problem with these was that the Curia had not yet approved some or all of these miracles as being genuine. Bellarmino's response was based on the Gregorian image theory that considered images as the literature of the illiterate. In this sense, if the Curia had allowed written *vitae* to be circulated, then pictorial *vitae* should also be permitted.<sup>908</sup> The Order took exactly the same position as their lamentations to the Pope in which they spoke about saints '*whose lives, succinctly written by the same Bosio already twenty five years ago or so, were printed here in Rome in the Apostolic Press of the Vatican, inserted in the Istorica and published for the world, and commonly appreciated, with thorough and diligent assessment and*

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<sup>904</sup> In some cases, such as with Pietro da Imola, the original sketch survives in the archives as we have seen above. In other cases, such as those of Ubaldesca and Gherardo Mecatti, the correspondence clearly shows that a number of knights were helping him make copies from old original frescoes and church paintings.

<sup>905</sup> Noyes, 818.

<sup>906</sup> Antonio Gallonio, *An liceat imagines hominum sanctitate illustrium nondum canonizatorum publice in tempio depictas habere* (Rome: 1602).

<sup>907</sup> Noyes, 822.

<sup>908</sup> Noyes, 825.

*permission from the superiors in particular the Congregation of Cardinals superintendents on these matters...'.<sup>909</sup>*

Historians such as Simon Ditchfield, Èmile Mâle and Ruth Noyes have referred to this polemic that led to the creation of the Congregation of Beatifications and the 1625 reforms, to explain what early Catholicism *did* rather than what it *was*; meaning a negotiated and lived, kinetic religion. Noyes points out that the 'surviving texts and images attest that throughout these debates of 1602, the respective definitions of altarpieces and altar images, and their derivative printed devotional replicas, remained theoretically unreconciled'<sup>910</sup> and if anything, the exchange involving Bosio's saints in 1619-1620 proves that almost two decades later, that was still the case. Bosio's hagiographic activities substantiate the view that these historians shared with regard to 'realigning the elements of body, tomb and image along a single common symbolic axis'<sup>911</sup> in Catholic devotional practices.

To fully understand the symbiosis (or lack thereof) between images and hagiographies, we also need to consider how the notion of sanctity itself evolved because of the images, shifting our attention from institutional polemic to the concrete changes that resulted from the dissemination of such imagery. In her study of hagiographic frontispieces from Naples, Helen Hills points out that not enough scholarly importance is given to the fact that the key element of these images was their portability.<sup>912</sup> Since illustrators generally opted for copper plate engraving, images of saints could be printed separately from the book, thus acquiring an existence beyond the book, as souvenirs in shrines, for instance. This made them a particularly useful medium for advancing claims of spiritual authority, which is why these images and their use sometimes proved contentious. According to Hills, the acceptance of a saint in popular

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<sup>909</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS17, f.254; '*Dovendosi hora ristampare la prima Parte dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione di San Giovanni Gier. Giacomo Bosio autore, ha havuto ordine espresso dal Granmaestro di far stampare in essa intagliate in rame, l'Imagini d'alcuni santi di detta Religione le cui vite succintamente scritti furono dal medesimo Bosio già venticinque anni sono, stampate quivi in Roma nella Tipografia Apostolica Vaticana, inserite nella medesima Istoria per il Mondo pubblicata e comunemente aggradita, con previa e diligente esamina, e licenza de superiori e particolarmente della Congregazione delli Cardenali soprintendenti alle cose, che nella detta Tipografia Vatticana all'ora si stampavano.*'

<sup>910</sup> Noyes, 827.

<sup>911</sup> Noyes, 822.

<sup>912</sup> Hills, Helen, "The Face is a mirror of the Soul' Frontispieces and the Production of Sanctity in Post-Tridentine Naples', *Art History*, Vol 31, No.4 (Sept. 2008), 547-573.

religion does not come from the canonical process, but from the devotees' ability to visualise and subsequently foster affection for the saint. Relics have the power to act as channels of intercession with the divine, but they still do not provide any clue as to what that individual used to look like.<sup>913</sup> Oftentimes the devotee could not even see beyond the reliquary, which also explains why reliquaries, even some of the earlier ones, were given anthropomorphic resemblances. To understand the Catholic clamour for reform in a holistic manner, one must also consider this need for proximity with the saints, having at hand something that one could take home. It is in part why Giacomo Bosio published the compendium on Hospitaller saints with the same images he had used in his history volumes: 'for the relative ease with which they [the readers] could carry with them, without much burden, this little book, almost like a mirror and constant reminder that excites and pushes them to behave well.'<sup>914</sup>



Figure 45: St Flora (Left) *Imagini de Beati e Santi* and (Right) Copy after Bosio to include the miracle of the roses (Courtesy - Heritage Malta)

<sup>913</sup> Hills (2008), 549.

<sup>914</sup> Bosio, *Imagini de' Beati e Santi*, 5; '...per la commodità, c'haveranno di portar seco, senza molto incomode, questo picciolo libricciuolo; quasi come uno specchio, e memorial continuo, che gli ecciti e spinga al ben'operare'.



The need for new forms and new faces was undoubtedly part of the wider Catholic reformation. Hills argues that there was, in fact, a shift in the very manner saints were depicted in works of *Vitae Sanctorum*. Up until the late sixteenth century, *Vitae* generally had tiny impersonal frontispieces with generic facial features and would be barely distinguishable if not for certain objects and symbols identifying them. Subsequently, these published images of saints became more elaborate with compositions evocative of larger church art. Even non-canonised saints were portrayed in heroic transcendental poses, half-way between the earth and heaven. In Bosio's cycle of saints, Fleur of Beaulieu's imagery is perhaps the one that illustrates this most clearly. She is shown kneeling in front of a vision of an angel who is pointing upwards, much like an Annunciation scene. In the top quarter, we see God the Father



Figure 46: Raymond Du Puy (after Bosio), Former Hospitaller Monastery of Penne (Courtesy - Museo Civico Diocesano di Penne)

with open arms, welcoming Flora to sit on a throne in heaven. It is understood that, like some of the other engravings, Bosio was copying from an earlier impression of this saint. Nonetheless, this comparison was a deliberate choice, which substantiates Helen Hills' argument that the hagiographers fully understood the effect that the illustrations had on the reader, and hence these images did not merely serve a decorative purpose.

Furthermore, they were set in a very specific landscape, even though sometimes with imaginary traits, but still identifiable in concept. Gherland of Poland has Caltagirone in the background, Garcia Martinez has Leza, and Raymond du Puy has the fortifications of Jerusalem that are being besieged by a Christian army. (Fig.46) Hills raises another important point that relates directly to the baroque period, namely the competitive aspect of religious orders in a city was also transmitted to the promotion of saints. This applies to the Order of St John as well, in that the importance of a particular saint in the city was often directly proportional to the prominence that the Order enjoyed in that city, and in turn, also explains why it was so important to link the saint to a place as a spatial identifier. Hence, Ugo of Genoa,



Figure 47: 'Remarkably Unremarkable' Blessed Pietro da Imola (left), (Ex-San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini, now in the church of San Lorenzo - Florence) (Cod. Naz. 0900161072), and Fra Agostino Grimaldi e Rosso (right), *L'Idée del Cavaliere* (Messina, 1662).

Flora of Beaulieu, Gherardo of Villamagna, and Toscana of Verona. The evolution of the artistic expression in these portable images shows that early modern Catholics were exploring different interpretations of holiness, and Rome did not have a monopoly over this, even though there was a relationship between the institutional reforms and popular piety. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, yet another change emerged in the way book plates represented holiness. Saints started being more commonly portrayed as living humans, drawing a closer parallel between the holy subject and the devout reader who could identify more with the person in the portrait.<sup>915</sup> These seemingly esthetical changes were in part a consequence of the 1625 reforms that limited the bestowal of halos to the Pope: ‘...this ruling paradoxically resulted in the potentially revolutionary depiction of living saints as remarkably unremarkable...’<sup>916</sup> (Fig. 47)

Hagiographers were not discouraged from writing about servants of God (non-canonised individuals), but the focus was no longer on showing their wonderful miracles as much as on promoting them as moral exemplars. As a result of this, the effect that the text had on the reader changed as well. If earlier hagiographies were designed to encourage a sense of awe at the saint’s prodigies, later works wanted to empower the reader to try and imitate the subject of the hagiography. Furthermore, later hagiographical narratives departed from the earlier reliance on historical texts and were built instead on visible and tangible examples that were still fresh in public memory.<sup>917</sup> The best examples of Hospitaller works that fit this profile were indeed written after Bosio, such as the biographies of Fra Agostino Grimaldi e Rosso (1633-1660) entitled *L’Idea del Cavaliere Gerosolimitano* (Messina, 1662)<sup>918</sup> and that of Fra Ambrogio Mariano d’Azzaro (ca.1510-1594) *il Cavaliere Romito* (Naples, 1693).<sup>919</sup> Apart from both being Hospitallers, what unites the two individuals born roughly a century apart, are Discalced Carmelite biographers: Giovanni Paolo dell’Epifania and Apollinare di San Gaetano.

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<sup>915</sup> Hills (2008), 550.

<sup>916</sup> Hills (2008), 550.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>918</sup> Dell’Epifania, Giovanni Paolo, *L’idea del Cavalier Gerosolimitano mostrata nella vita di Fra D. Agostino Grimaldo, e Rosso* (Messina: Giacomo Mattei, 1662).

<sup>919</sup> Di San Gaetano, Apollinare, *Il Cavaliere Romito, Storia Panegerica del V.P.F. Ambrogio Mariano di S. Benedetto* (Naples: Vernuccio e Layno, 1693).

These volumes precisely reflect the tone and form that Hills ascribed for the second half of the seventeenth century, including the careful clarification that the subject of the work was not a canonised saint, the bust frontispiece, the heavy reliance on eye-witness accounts and a holiness that is based on discipline, good moral values, and daily perseverance in one's chosen vocation. Compared to earlier depictions of saints and blessed, these new individuals are presented as self-conscious shapers of their own sanctity, as opposed to being subjects of divine visions and prodigies; a holiness that comes from within. That said, ample importance is given in both works to the Order's role in shaping sanctity in these individuals. Dell'Epifania reproduced a portrait of Agostino in the first pages. (Fig. 50) What is striking is the presence of no less than four Hospitaller eight-pointed crosses in the same image (pendant, cape, coat of arms, and banner), making sure that there would be no mistake that Agostino was not just a knight who was also incidentally holy, but that his membership in the Order of St John was the means with which he attained perfection. In the case of Fra Ambrogio Mariano, Apollinare di San Gaetano dedicated two pages to giving a short summary of the saints and blessed of the Order, citing Bosio, simply to show how the '*Hermit knight*' was following in the footsteps of saints. Whilst the Sicilian Fra Agostino Grimaldi, killed in action at Candia,<sup>920</sup> was being modelled after the martyr Nicasius, Fra Ambrogio Mariano could certainly qualify as a new Gherardo Mecatti da Villamagna. Just as Beato Mecatti met St Francis, one of the greatest saints of his time, to receive from his own hands the Franciscan habit, so did Fra Ambrogio meet St Therese of Avila, a great saint of his times, who convinced him to take the Carmelite habit.<sup>921</sup>

Another common feature in the lives of both Fra Agostino and Fra Ambrogio is the pivotal role of Ignatian spirituality. Fra Agostino was educated by the Jesuits, as well as being a member of the *Congregazione de' Nobili* at the Jesuit College in Modica.<sup>922</sup> In Malta, he served his *carovana* under the captainship of Fra Baldassare Desmandols, a prominent member and patron of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the *Collegium Melitense*.<sup>923</sup> As for Fra Ambrogio, while in the service of King Philip II in Cordoba, he followed the Ignatian

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<sup>920</sup> Dell'Epifania, 166.

<sup>921</sup> Di San Gaetano, 335.

<sup>922</sup> Dell'Epifania, 47.

<sup>923</sup> ACM, Coll. Ges. *Giornale Maggiore* 1646-1661, f.29; Fra Balthasar Desmandols left an endowment of 100 scudi for the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception in the Jesuit College of Valletta, July 1649.

Spiritual Exercises which were a turning point in his life, as from that moment he decided to live a life of asceticism and solitude.<sup>924</sup> These works are being mentioned for their comparative value with the work that Bosio published. They show the application of a similar language to impart notions of holiness by non-Hospitaller hagiographers. Just as much as Bosio was representative of the heroic or transcendental typology, so were his 'successors' representative of the mood in their own period. This addresses the question of not knowing how far Bosio's *Dell'Istoria* and *Imagini de' Beati e Santi* were representative of the period in which they were written; they clearly were.

Seeing Bosio's publication of the images of saints within a framework of an evolving visual expression of holiness makes it easier to identify his impact and limitations in promoting a certain type of holiness. If we had to accept that, through a combination of historical documents, networks, and knowledge of Church practices, Bosio was able to promote old saints of the Order as new ones, then we must accept, as well, that he was limited by those very same mechanisms, resulting in the exclusion of some other candidates. There were, of course, other individuals in the Order who had lived a saintly life: in the letter by the two Provençal knights mentioned earlier on, they asked Bosio to consider two other French candidates. In the same letter, they had also asked for the inclusion of Saint Fleur of Beaulieu, which was included by Bosio in his cycle. More curious is the fact that Bosio had obtained permission to include Sancha Queen of Aragon (*Fig.48*) and Andrea King of Hungary<sup>925</sup> in his original cycle which were published in the volumes on the history of the Order, but when he published the 1622 edition of *Le Imagini de' Beati e Santi*, there was no trace of these two monarchs. They resurfaced in the 1632 reprint of *Le Imagini de' Beati e Santi*, published by Francesco Truglio<sup>926</sup> and dedicated to none other than Fra Carlo Aldobrandini, who was most probably responsible for passing on the original image plates to Truglio.

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<sup>924</sup> Di San Gaetano, 191.

<sup>925</sup> In one of the scenes painted by Lionello Spada in 1609 for the Grand Master's Palace, this Blessed of the Order is represented, but nowhere else. The Commission that chose Spada included Fra Francesco Antella, and the cycle of frescoes on the history of the Order was based on Bosio's text and was heavily inspired by Tempesta's battle scenes.

<sup>926</sup> Giacomo Bosio, *Imagini de' Beati e Santi...* (Palermo: Francesco Truglio, 1632).



Archival evidence so far has not yielded any information on why Bosio omitted Sancha of Aragon and Andrea of Hungary from his *Imagini de' Beati e Santi*. Among the Aldobrandini papers are a number of short biographies and a few drawings, as well, some of which he used and some he did not. Among these are coloured half-portraits of Sancha of Aragon and her daughter Doña Dulce,<sup>927</sup> infanta of Aragon and a nun of the Order in the monastery of Sijena, of which her mother was the founder.<sup>928</sup> Research on Galiotta de Gourdon de Genouillac, known as Madre di S. Anna [1589-1618], the most recently deceased candidate presented to Bosio, features in a hagiographic copy of an undated and unsigned letter.<sup>929</sup>

Figure 48: Queen Sancha of Aragon (below) and her daughter Dulce (left), Early seventeenth century (MS. 7, Bosio-Aldobrandini Archive, Villa Poggio a Castelmartini, Larciano- Pistoia)



Documentary evidence was meant to corroborate the antiquity of the cult, not necessarily the reliability of the *vita* itself. Images as devotional materiality were the most frequently adopted piece of evidence that Bosio resorted to for this purpose. It also seems that Bosio generally kept away from including martyrs in his list, with the only exception being St Nicasius, a twelfth-century ‘crusader’. As the lamentations to the Pope rightly pointed out,

<sup>927</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS VII, no fol.

<sup>928</sup> After the death of her husband, King Alphonse II of Aragon, Sancha joined her daughter in the monastery of Sijena.

<sup>929</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS V, no fol.; Although it is not dated, the letter is presumably from 1618-1622.

the Order's violent history in defence of the faith included hundreds of casualties, all technically qualifying for the title of martyr. Nevertheless, Bosio knew that, although the Church was literally hunting for martyrs (his nephew Antonio was the principal discoverer of many of these),<sup>930</sup> it was reluctant to canonize any officially. With Nicasius, we see Bosio using documentary evidence to corroborate the antiquity of the cult rather than providing an ironclad hagiography. The only documentation extant on Nicasius (who also had a saintly brother St Ferrandino, excluded or unknown to Bosio) that the Order published surfaced in an eighteenth-century *Codice Diplomatico*,<sup>931</sup> a mishmash of historical documents from the archives that were grouped together by Padre Sebastiano Paoli (1684-1751).<sup>932</sup>

There are indications that the Order also commemorated the memory of some early modern martyrs as well, including Adrian Fortescue (who is still commemorated as a Blessed of the Order even though it is now known that he was not a Hospitaller),<sup>933</sup> David Gunston and Thomas Ingley (or Dingley). All three were killed during the persecution of Catholics during the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>934</sup> Fra Francesco Buonarroto owned

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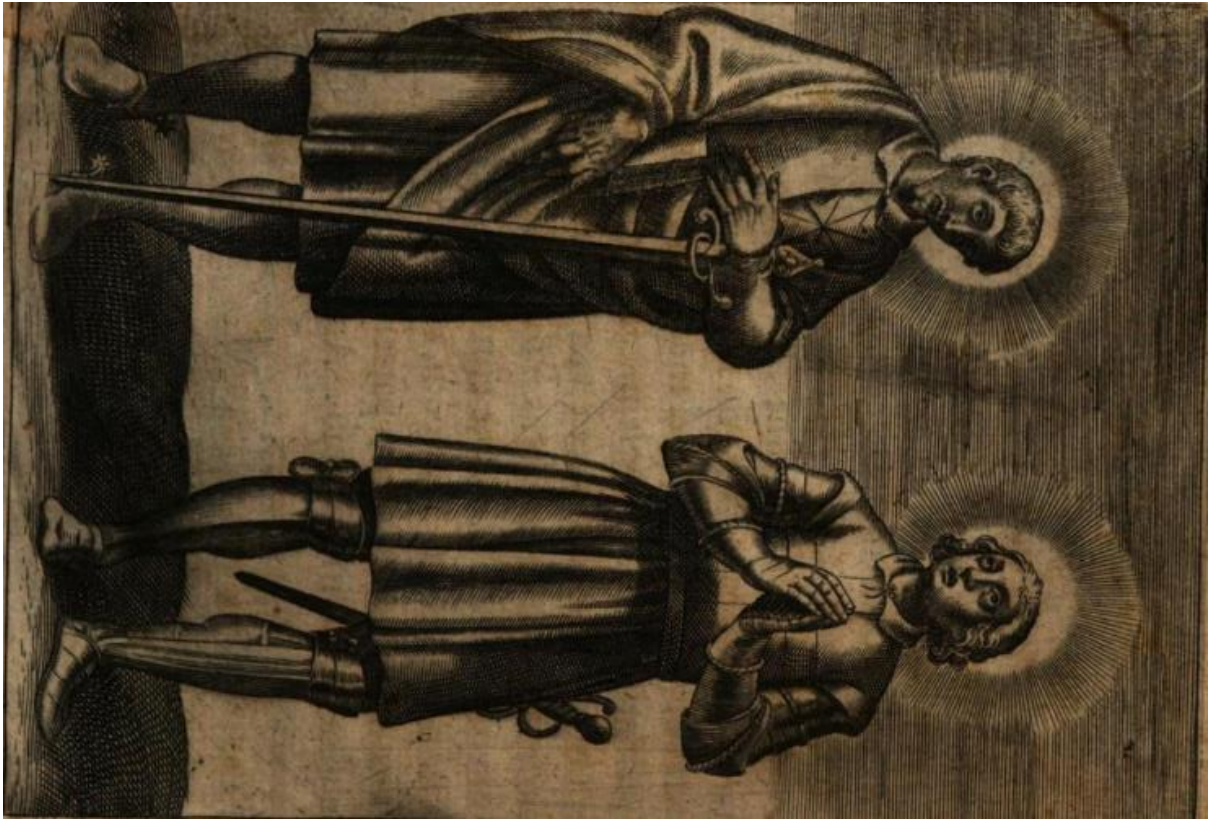
<sup>930</sup> Cecalupo, Chiara, *Antonio Bosio, La Roma Sotteranea e I Primi Collezionisti di Antichita' Cristiane*, Vol. 1 Profile Storico (Citta' del Vaticano: 2020).

<sup>931</sup> Paoli, Sebastiano, *Codice Diplomatico del Sovrano Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano...*, Vol I (Lucca: 1733), p. 82 Cod. 78: 'Documenti Spettanti a SS. MM. Ferrandino e Nicasio, mandati autentici all'Archivio di Malta dal Comm. Fra Giuseppe de Nobili.'

<sup>932</sup> Paoli was a member of the Congregation of the Mother of God. He came to Malta in 1730 as a preacher for the knights, upon the invitation of Grand Master Antonio Vilhena. He, however, served the Order both as a theologian and a historian, as evidenced by both his published sermons, as well as works of a more historical nature. Paoli was a friend and collaborated with the Italian historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori for a period.

<sup>933</sup> Rex, Richard, 'Blessed Adrian Fortescue, a Martyr without a Cause?', *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. 115, Nos. ¾ (1997), 307-353.

<sup>934</sup> De Remond, Florimond, *L'Histoire de la Naissance, Progrez et Decadence de l'Heresie de ce Siecle* (Rouven: 1622), 653 '...le 28 jour de May 1541: Et par mesme sentence son fils fut condamne avet Gertrude Marquise d'Ex [Exeter], Edrian Fortescu Chevalier de l'Ordre, & Thomas d'Ingley Chevalier de Ierusalem, ces deux Chevaliers eurent puis apres le dixiesme de luillet la teste coupée.'; Some sources place their death in 1539, but there is no contemporary vita for either of these knights. The volume is dedicated to Francois Cardinal Joyeux, who had a brother Henri, who was a member of the Order.





two *Terra Sigillata* medallions showing Adrian Fortescue and Thomas Ingley. (Fig.50) While Buonarroti's medallion is quite possibly the only devotional extant image of Fra Ingley, Adrian Fortescue is represented in the Wignacourt Museum cycle, the same cycle or a copy of the one that used to hang in St John's Church in Valletta before the commission of the new set by Mattia Preti. Noticeable, on the other hand, is the absence in both visual and published sources on Fra David Gunston (Gunson/Genson) who was hung, drawn, and quartered for refusing to accept the king as the supreme head of the Church. Gunston was executed in 1541, only months after Adrian Fortescue and Thomas Dingley.<sup>935</sup> Gunston was never considered a saint on par with the latter two, possibly given his quarrelsome character.<sup>936</sup> He was simply given the appellation of 'the good knight' in the Council Minutes, but not *beato* or *santo*.<sup>937</sup> There is little indication that his cult every had a following within the Order. He is not even mentioned in the official histories of the Order. As for Ingley and Fortescue, their execution was first mentioned by published sources that are not directly related to the Order. The



Figure 50: Thomas Ingley (Left) and Adrian Fortescue (Right), *Terra Sigillata Melitensis* (Courtesy - Museo Casa Buonarroti, Florence)

<sup>935</sup> There were possibly other Hospitallers who were executed later by Elizabeth I. As for Adrian Fortescue, whose cult was far more popular than Dingley's, and his association with the Hospitaller Fra Thomas Dingley, who suffered the same fate, see Richard Rex (1997).

<sup>936</sup> Mifsud, Alfredo, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England* (Valletta: 1914), 205. In 1535, Gunston was involved in an altercation with Fra Philip Babington and Fra Christopher Myers. The quarrel ended in a bloody duel. Babington is presumably the person who denounced Gunston in England, leading to Gunston's arrest, whilst Myers was later expelled from the Order after murdering a woman.

<sup>937</sup> A.O.M., 955, f. 31r.

earliest published Hospitaller record of Adrian Fortescue's martyrdom seems to be Goussancourt's *Martyrologe*.<sup>938</sup>

Another 'beata' that can be found in later works such as those by Mathieu Goussancourt and Bartolomeo dal Pozzo,<sup>939</sup> but which is absent in devotional materiality, is Suor Galiotta de Gourdon Genouillac. (Fig. 51) We came across Galiotta earlier in this chapter, in a letter written by two Provençal knights to Giacomo Bosio, only months after her death, asking him to include Suor Genouillac in his hagiographies. Bosio also had in his possession a short *Vita* of this saint.<sup>940</sup> In the absence of an old cult or proof of any miracles, Bosio left it at that. On the other hand, not only did Mathieu Goussancourt give prominence to Galiotta, he dedicated the *Martyrologe des Chevaliers* to her brother,<sup>941</sup> and included their family tree and a small image of '*Blesse Galiotte*', complete with a halo.<sup>942</sup> Goussancourt made reference to what is possibly the earliest published *Vita* of Galiotta, that by Pere Thomas d'Aquin St Joseph (1633).<sup>943</sup> The story of this nun, who took the name of Suor Galiotta di S. Anna, bears similarities with the imagery of female conventual life we get from the hagiographies of Fleur, a nun from the same convent of Beaulieu, or her Italian counterparts Ubaldesca and Toscana. The premature death at the age of twenty-five hints at a case of holy anorexia,<sup>944</sup> not at all uncommon in female cloistered sainthood. Perhaps Suor di S. Anna's greatest attribute was her role as a reformer of female religious life at the turn of the seventeenth century, similar to Jeanne de Chantal. She was responsible for joining the monastery of Fieux to that of Beaulieu, a move that greatly benefitted the Order and gave the Prioress better control over the asceticism of the nuns. Despite her short life, she was catapulted to the leadership of the monastery of Beaulieu and Fieux at a very young age through the influence of some of her

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<sup>938</sup> Goussancourt, Mathieu, *Le Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Hiérusalem, dits de Malte* (Paris: Simon Piget, 1654), 302; says only that he was beheaded in 1541 for refusing to follow Henry VIII's heresy.

<sup>939</sup> Dal Pozzo I, 674.

<sup>940</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS 5, no pag.

<sup>941</sup> Jean Paul, Abbe de Saint-Romain

<sup>942</sup> There are two editions of Goussancourt, one dated 1643 and the other 1654. The image and dedication are present in the 1654 edition, placed at the start of the first Tome, whereas in the 1643 edition, her entry is on page 316 with coat of arms and family tree but no image.

<sup>943</sup> D'Aquin a St Joseph, Thomas, *La bienheureuse Galiotte de Gourdon de Genouillac de Vaillac...* (Paris: 1633). The same source is quoted by Helyot, Pierre, *Histoire des 284ostra monastiques religieux et militaires...* (Paris: 1715), 140. Helyot gives a history of the monastery of Beaulieu and an overview of the life of Galiotte, as part of his work on the monastic life of the Order of St John in France and elsewhere.

<sup>944</sup> On Holy Anorexia, see: Bell, Rudolph, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

family members, the powerful Counts of Vaillac, who coveted the monastery's wealth for themselves. She, however, made use of her unsolicited authority to instil spiritual discipline among her consœurs.<sup>945</sup>



Figure 51: Mathieu Goussancourt, *Le Martyrologe Des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Hierusalem* (1654)

In his discussion on the debates on images that ‘bypassed Trent’, Wietse de Boer summarised the problem of images:

‘In a nutshell, we can say that the tension between two ways of understanding the sacred image continued to play out: a referential view of the image as a sign of something else; and its categorization as a sacred object among others.’<sup>946</sup>

While images (in the broad sense of ‘*imago*’) as sacred objects, that is, as channels of divine power presented their problems (as was discussed in reference to miraculous icons, copies

<sup>945</sup> Arch. Aldob. MS V, no pag.

<sup>946</sup> De Boer, *Art in Dispute*, 124.

and flying Madonnas), images such as these portraits, even the ‘remarkably unremarkable’<sup>947</sup> ones, present very different challenges. The above discussion has attempted to consider images holistically, by looking beyond their artistic merit as decorative features, to discern how exactly de Boer’s assertion applies to Hospitaller notions of the sacred in art. What emerges is a strong dissimilarity between the two categories, starting from what exactly was being scrutinised. In cases where images were also considered sacred objects, the focus shifted from the subject of the image to the kineticism contained within its materiality, in other words, the performative ability of an image to do things or to act as a prop in a religious ritual.<sup>948</sup> Where images were meant to convey meaning, it is the subject itself that was under scrutiny, with the risk of the former being seen as superstitious, but the latter as subversive, possibly heretical. A point that follows, therefore, concerns elements of continuity and change in the production of sacred art. Apart from producing more sophisticated arguments which justified or explained the embedded kineticism in images as sacred objects, little change occurred to the manifestation and devotional behaviour that surrounded these images.

There is a strong element of continuity, particularly in regard to miraculous images, with all the major devotions, including Hospitaller ones (Philermos, Liesse, Vico, Corona, Salceda, Montserrat, Loreto etc.) being essentially medieval works of art. Conversely, as this chapter has demonstrated, images produced as *peinture parlant*, which were meant to convey a message such as a saint’s *vita et miracula*, not only followed contemporary artistic styles as any new art would but also reflected evolving notions of sainthood and was subject to ever-changing rules.<sup>949</sup> Nevertheless, change, as was argued above, was much more frequent (from generic iconography to an idealised realism, to mundane and relatable), and closely followed the evolving mechanism that examined sanctity in the Catholic Church. ‘So, we witness the appearance of new saints, saints after the image of their own time, very different

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<sup>947</sup> Hills (2008), 550.

<sup>948</sup> For a stimulating debate on devotional images and their kineticism, particularly in the later Middle Ages, see: Walker Bynum, Caroline, *Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

<sup>949</sup> Ditchfield, ‘Thinking with saints’, 563; ‘Above all, we owe Mâle a considerable debt for his belief that in order to understand the age of the Catholic Counter-Reformation we need to appreciate how the depiction of saints became a kind of laboratory in which the artists and their (institutional) patrons sought to give visual expression to a new understanding of saints and sanctity born out of post-Reformation confessional polemic.’

from those of former days.<sup>950</sup> This does not mean that this new art could not do both at the same time. For instance, in the first church dedicated to Francis Xavier, in Kôttar (India) in 1603, years before his canonisation, the image of the saint-to-be was held to possess miraculous powers. Perhaps Fra Francesco Buonarroti's images of Hospitaller saints on the *Terra Sigillata* medals are an example of how some images might resist a clean categorisation.

### ***Prosopography of Hospitaller Saints and Blessed.***

So far we have focused on the liturgical, political, and visual environment of saints, but in the next few pages, we will turn to Hospitaller saints and blessed as a collective cultural group, comparing them prosopographically to the cults that were endorsed by the Church during the Counter-Reformation. The saints of the Order as presented by Bosio reflected the general perception of who would be the ideal candidate for sanctity in Tridentine Catholicism.<sup>951</sup> Pierre Delooz and Peter Burke proposed the idea that some communities were 'programmed' to perceive sanctity in a certain way, implying that it was not only necessary to possess a certain set of values to become a Catholic saint, but that social background was also a central part of the image of a saint.<sup>952</sup> That background, an indicator of social and cultural trends, places a greater emphasis on the methodological problem of whether to study saints as indicators of the times when they lived or as indicators of trends prevalent in the time when they were canonised.<sup>953</sup> In concordance with Burke, favouring the latter, this work will also consider saints as witnesses to the period of their canonisation, or more accurately in this case, to the proliferation of their hagiographies with the clear intent to promote their cause. Burke chose to focus on the 55 individuals who were canonised between 1588 and 1767, though with the proviso that such a small sample could not produce accurate statistical data

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<sup>950</sup> Mâle, Émile, *Religious Art: From the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: 1958), 178; quoted by Ditchfield, 'Thinking with saints', 563.

<sup>951</sup> Corti, Laura, 'Santi ed Eroi: L'Immaginario dei Cavalieri Gerosolimitani' in *Lungo il tragitto crociato della vita* Laura Corti, Francesco Amendolagine, and Maria Doglioni, (eds.) (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), 201-227.

<sup>952</sup> Delooz, Pierre, *Sociologie et canonisations* (1969), op. cit. Burke, Peter 'How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint', in *The Counter-Reformation: the essential readings*, David M. Luebke (ed.) (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 135.

<sup>953</sup> Burke, 'How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint', 135.



or percentages.<sup>954</sup> Burke's chosen timeline (1588-1767) represents the period in between two long breaks in canonisations, notwithstanding a third hiatus that took place in the seventeenth century (1626-1658). While this study concurs fully with Ditchfield's assertion that the history of the cult of saints needs to move beyond the study of canonisations,<sup>955</sup> Burke's analysis of the 55 papal canonisations can still be used as a baseline, including for a comparative prosopography with Hospitaller saints as listed by Giacomo Bosio in 1622.

Firstly, attention must be drawn to the fact that we will be comparing a group of pontifically canonised saints for universal practice, with a group of saints that was only partly allowed to exist on a local level, some of whom eventually received further recognition (like Ubaldesca) whilst others slowly disappeared from the liturgical ecosystem. Similarly, between 1524 and 1588, when official canonisations were on a hiatus, the papacy still acknowledged, in equipollent form, the cults of fourteen regional holy people, including one child (St Simonino of Trento).<sup>956</sup> Nonetheless, Burke pointed out that a substantial portion of these, as well as a sizeable portion of the individual *beati moderni* post-1588, went on to be canonised in the period he took into consideration, as well, to a point that they would not affect the conclusions very much.<sup>957</sup> The same issue relates to Hospitaller saints, as the previous sections discussed, whereby alongside the eleven individuals presented by Bosio in the first edition of his *Imagini de Beati e Santi*, a further two were added in the second edition curated by Aldobrandini, notwithstanding the English martyrs and other candidates like Sister Genouillac who had a much lesser, more ambiguous following. Burke's greatest contribution, in fact, was not limited to what he called 'objective factors' of sainthood, such as social origins or gender,<sup>958</sup> despite their importance, but to a more holistic analysis of the counter-reformation perception of sanctity.<sup>959</sup> He identified five main profiles of saints, which he called 'routes', that are the most predominant among those 55 canonised, and arguably remained predominant until at least Vatican Council II.<sup>960</sup> The five routes are: founders of religious orders, missionaries, charity makers, good shepherds, and mystics. This does not

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<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>955</sup> Ditchfield, 'Coping with the beati moderni', 418.

<sup>956</sup> Ditchfield, 'Coping with the Beati Moderni', 419.

<sup>957</sup> Burke, 'Counter-Reformation Saints', 136.

<sup>958</sup> Something that other scholars such as Weinstein and Bell covered extensively.

<sup>959</sup> Burke, 'Counter-Reformation Saints', 136.

<sup>960</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

mean that all saints, universal or Hospitaller, fall neatly into one of these categories, but that there were simply qualities that were more prevalent than others, perhaps because they were somewhat more relatable. Beyond this, one must not forget the need to consider the cults of saints as a 'synaesthetic experience, involving all the senses and thus requiring analysis of a language that was visual as well as textual, symbolic and spiritual as well as concrete and literal'.<sup>961</sup> It is this understanding of prosopography that the present study intends to adopt, one that is not concerned solely with percentages, but focuses more on those synaesthetic qualities and what they were meant to evoke.

A final methodological point concerns the chronology. Burke's 55 saints, canonised between 1588 and 1767,<sup>962</sup> will be compared to candidates who were promoted mainly from the 1580s to the 1620s. Nevertheless, it still makes sense to compare them, simply because the Order's promotion of its saints does not stop with Bosio's 1622 publication, but rather takes inspiration from it for the next century and a half. Furthermore, even though, at face value, the chronologies do not match, the period that Burke scrutinised only makes sense when considered as two subsequent chronologies rather than one long one. The first phase ran from the establishment of the Congregation of Rites in 1588 to the Papal Bull of 1634 *Caelestis Hierusalem Cives* and showcased the evolution of the process and the creation of canonical mechanisms.<sup>963</sup> The second period was characterised by an implementation of these processes, as well as the confirmation of a number of individuals whom the first period had brought to the fore.<sup>964</sup> In Hospitaller terms, we have a process that also starts slowly during Verdalle's Magistracy in the 1580s to reach its culmination in the second part of Wignacourt's Magistracy (1610-1621), delineating Giovanni Papa's 'first period'. Yet to appreciate fully the impact that Bosio's work, despite all its hagiographical limitations, had on the Hospitaller notion of saintly attributes, we must consider, as Burke did, a wider chronology. The rest of this section will argue that the pattern of saintly attributes that emerged from Burke's prosopography places Hospitaller saints and blessed firmly within the profile of universal Catholic Counter-Reformation saints.

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<sup>961</sup> Ditchfield, 'Thinking with Saints', 554.

<sup>962</sup> Burke, 'How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint', 138.

<sup>963</sup> Papa, Giovanni, (2001).

<sup>964</sup> Such as John of God and Pascal Baylon for instance, beatified in the first period and canonised in the second.

Let us consider first, the objective factors, for instance, that men were more likely to obtain sainthood, with 43 out of the 55 canonised in that period being male. The Order had a similar ratio of eight out of eleven saints and blessed being men. Secondly, the country of origin also played an important role, with 26 of the 55 being Italian, seventeen Spanish, and the remaining twelve from other countries. Similarly, within the Order of St John, six out of eleven were Italian, with doubts about the country of origin of the first rector of the Hospital, Blessed Gerard. Social standing was not a secondary matter either, with saints of a confirmed noble origin amounting to 26 out of the 55 candidates canonised between 1588 and 1767. Even if Bosio did not refer to the status at birth in all his cases, in at least two instances (Raymond du Puy and Toscana), he specifically mentions that they were born in wealthy and influential households. He does so to further promote the value of their choice to relinquish earthly possessions and offer their lives in the service of the poor.

Turning to Burke's five routes of sanctity, the first is that of founders of religious institutions. There were twelve individuals from the above-mentioned period who fit this category, including some of the most renowned heroes of Tridentinism, such as Therese of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales (1567-1622), Cajetan of Thiene (1480-1547), Camillo de Lellis (1550-1614), and Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). Philip Neri and John of God are both considered posthumous founders of the Oratorians and the Brothers Hospitaller respectively.<sup>965</sup> Similarly, the Order held Fra Gerard and Fra Raymond du Puy as blessed founders of the Order. Like Neri and John of God, Blessed Gerard might have started his charitable activities without the intent of formally founding a religious organisation. Nevertheless, according to Bosio, he was still alive when his small group of lay brothers received official recognition by means of a Papal Bull in 1113.<sup>966</sup> Bosio, however, attributes the first Magistracy to Raymond du Puy, who also wrote a Rule for the Order, similar to that of St Augustine, but with particular elements that reminded the members of the Order of their spiritual, charitable and military calling: 'With that habit he (du Puy) wanted the mantle to be a reminder of the of camel hide, that St John the Baptist, protector and advocate of this

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<sup>965</sup> Burke, 'How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint', 138.

<sup>966</sup> Bosio, *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 13 : 'Mori egli, anzi se ne volò all' eterna vita nell'anno di 290ostras alute, mille, cento, e diciotto...'



Order, wore in the desert. The cross of eight points alludes also to the eight Evangelical Beatitudes.<sup>967</sup> Furthermore, de Puy is presented as a teacher of virtues, the one saintly quality that the council had acknowledged, hoping to instil in a Hospitaller ‘presented with the exterior habit, the desire to carry in the internal habit the spiritually impressed sign of the vivifying cross.’ He also wanted ‘to kindle the wish to follow the generous and valuable example of martyr saints and intrepid Maccabean soldiers, who laid their hopes in divine help.’<sup>968</sup>

The imagery of female saints is also consistent with the Tridentine trends. Reading Bosio’s short biographies of the three female saints of the Order - St Toscana, St Ubaldesca, and St Flora - one would immediately notice some recurrent themes from the lives of their later counterparts such as St Therese of Avila, St Rose of Lima, St Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, and St Caterina Ricci, in Burke’s terms, the category of mystics.<sup>969</sup> All three Hospitaller nuns lived within the monastic setup, though still in contact with the outside world. St Toscana and possibly even St Flora were from wealthy families, whilst St Ubaldesca was born of humbler origins. They lived a life of penance, fasting, and corporal mortification. St Ubaldesca, for example, demonstrated her absolute devotion to God by ‘softening her flesh with a cilice, with discipline, abstinence, fasting and continuous prayer,’ and it was because of this deep spiritual devotion to God that she was honoured with the power of performing miracles in life.<sup>970</sup> St Flora was tormented by her fellow nuns in the monastery of Beaulieu, but her humility and sense of self-sacrifice in the face of adversity were also rewarded with mystical attributes. St Toscana was married off by her parents, and she fulfilled her duty for as long as her husband lived. When she became a widow, she offered perpetual chastity to God, despite being still young and beautiful, and took vows with the Order of St John. Other parallels can be drawn between the biographies of female saints of the Order and Tridentine ones, for

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<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 ; ‘Co’l qual Manto, alluder volle egli, come alcuni voglino, al vestmento di pelle di Camelo, che nel deserto portava San Giovanni Battista avvocato, e protettore di questa religiosa, e sacra Militia. Accennando con le otto punte della Croce, alle otto Beatitudini Evangeliche.’

<sup>968</sup> Bosio, 18 ; ‘...accioche dall’habito esteriore ammoniti, s’avvezzassero a portar nell’habito interior ancora, e spiritualmente impresso il Segno della vivificante Croce, E s’invogliassero, e accendessero a seguir il generoso, e salutare esempio de’ Santi Martiri ed intrepidi Soldati Macabei, i quali si come riponendo la speranza loro nel celeste aiuto...’

<sup>969</sup> Burke, 138.

<sup>970</sup> Bosio, *Le Immagini de’ Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 35 ; ‘...macerando la carne co’l cilicio, con le discipline, con l’astinenza, con digiuni e con le continue orationi...’

example, in that sanctity usually manifests itself in a candidate from a very young age. Maria Maddalena de Pazzi<sup>971</sup> and Caterina Ricci both showed signs of an ascetic and saintly life in their childhood and early youth. Similarly, Ubaldesca prayed to God to show her the path to a life which would most please him, spending endless days in prayer and acts of charity. 'At the age of 14, following a vision from an angel, she consecrated her purity to God, to the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist, taking the habit and regular profession in the Order of St John of Jerusalem, becoming a nun.'<sup>972</sup>

There are two common themes present throughout these short biographies of *Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*: one is the element of charity and the other is a continuous reference to miracles performed by these individuals. Charity was one of the major recurrent themes in Tridentine sanctity and another of Burke's five routes to sanctity. At least seven of those canonised between 1588 and 1767 were known specifically for charitable activities, in particular, Vincent de Paul for his work among galley-slaves and more conspicuously the hospitaller virtues of Cammillo de Lellis (d.1614) and John of God (d.1505).<sup>973</sup> De Lellis, like the Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola, was a soldier before he moved to Rome and founded a religious order tasked with the care of the 'incurables'.<sup>974</sup> John of God gathered a small group of lay brothers to work with the sick and infirm in Granada, eventually becoming the Brothers Hospitaller of St John of God. In Bosio's hagiographies, Brother Gerard and Raymond du Puy in the twelfth-century Holy Land were portrayed in terms that were not unlike those singled out in John of God and Camillo de Lellis, although in Bosio's time, both were still a long way from being canonised.<sup>975</sup>

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<sup>971</sup> Copeland, Claire, *Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, The Making of a Counter-Reformation Saint* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2016).

<sup>972</sup> Bosio, *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 34 ; '*Perilche Giunta, ch'ella fù all'età di quattordici anni; per ammonitione dell'Angelo di Dio, dedicò e consacrò la verginita sua a Dio; alla gloriosa Vergine Maria, e a San Giovanni Battista; sotto l'habito, e professione regolare della Sacra Religione di San Giovanni Gierosolimitano, facendosi monaca...*'

<sup>973</sup> Burke, *How to become a Counter-Reformation Saint*, 138.

<sup>974</sup> Just like the Hospitallers, Camillo de Lellis served in the Venetian wars against Ottomans, but was crippled by a leg wound. This was the reason why he was not admitted into the Capuchin Order and eventually chose to work with people whose ailments were termed incurable.

<sup>975</sup> John of God was beatified in 1630 but would only be canonised in 1690. De Lellis had to wait until 1742 to be beatified, canonised soon after in 1746, however Bosio and De Lellis were contemporaries, both living in Rome.

When recounting the acts of Raymond du Puy in particular, the author intentionally alternates between discussing acts of charity performed daily in the hospital, and the armed defence of Christians and the Holy Land, consciously repeating the assertion that one is simply an extension of the other. Active life, be it in the hospital or wielding a sword, does not exclude moments of prayer. In the cycle of etchings of the saints that accompany the hagiographies, Bosio represents Raymond du Puy holding a crucifix in one hand, with a *Paternoster* in the other and a sword at his side. The crucifix represents the ultimate act of *caritas*; the love of Christ for humanity which culminated in the Cross. The sword represents the armed defence of the faith, whilst the *Paternoster* reminds the Hospitaller of daily prayer as established by the first Rule. According to Bosio, there is no contradiction in terms between piety and violence, quite the opposite. Raymond du Puy's sanctity lies in the fact that he managed to combine all three activities, the three pillars that contributed to the Order's success. All the acts performed by the Order of St John in the service of Christendom from that point on were made possible by du Puy's able leadership and heroic saintly attributes: 'Just as with his virtues he (Raymond du Puy), paved the path, on which his successors endeavoured, and through which they, with the grace of God, resulted so much good and honourable deeds in this world.'<sup>976</sup> In fact, no mention is made of any miracles he performed, either in life or in the afterlife. His claim to saintly heroism follows a similar reasoning that was adopted for the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order. These seven founders were considered as one in terms of the cause for their beatification in 1717, and much of their cult was based on their collective legacy rather than individual merit. Even though in Bosio's time, the Seven Founders were a century from beatification and further still from their canonisation (1888), Bosio's friend, Fra Francesco dell'Antella, was a descendent and promoter of the cult of Manetto dell'Antella, one of the seven. Fra Francesco had the not-yet-beatified Manetto portrayed in a 1622 painting next to St Carlo Borromeo, St James, St Lucy, and the soon-to-be St Philip Neri, for the altar of Our Lady of the Lily in the commandery church of San Jacopo Corbolini in Florence.<sup>977</sup> (Fig.52)

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<sup>976</sup> Bosio, *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 25 : 'Onde si come egli con le Virtu' sue, ha additata la strada, per la quale caminando poi i Succesori suoi, hanno con l'aiuto di Dio, ridotte le cose dell'istesso sacro Ordine loro, all'ampiezza di tanti beni...'

<sup>977</sup> Workshop of Matteo Rosselli; Catalogo Beni Culturali, Codice di Catalogo Nazionale 0900161073; See: Sebregondi Fiorentini, *San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini*.



Figure 52: Altarpiece of Our Lady of the Lilly with Saints James the Elder, Lucy, Carlo Borromeo, Manetto dell'Antella and Philip Neri, workshop of Matteo Rosselli (1622) (Photo Credit- Emanuel Buttigieg)



Acts of charity were also intimately linked with the signs of sanctity that God sent. At the time of the publication of *de Beati e Santi* in 1622, it was not yet explicitly decided that a candidate for sainthood should be assessed only on the basis of miracles performed after one's death.<sup>978</sup> Not all signs were accepted as coming from God as even the devil was capable of making signs and tricks which could be easily mistaken for miracles from God.<sup>979</sup> To reassure the reader that these saints were indeed prophets of God, even their miracles were presented in a particular manner. Departing from the belief that good comes from good as evil comes from evil, these signs had to be linked to an act of selfless love. Secondly, some of these signs, miracles and actions of Hospitaller saints evoked a link with Christ's miracles in the gospels or the deeds of the traditional saints of Christianity. As Bosio writes, 'Nothing could alter the



Figure 53: Hospitaller Saints with the symbols of their Miracles (Left to Right: Ubaldesca with the bucket, Brother Gerard with the bread in his apron, Gherardo Mecatti with the Cherries, Toscana, Nicasius in armour, Ugo of Genova and his stream of water and Raymond du Puy with the Rule) (Malta, eighteenth century., Francesco Zahra) [Courtesy – Mdina Metropolitan Chapter]

<sup>978</sup> Simon Ditchfield, 'How not to be a Counter-Reformation Saint: The Attempted Canonization of Pope Gregory X, 1622-45' in *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 60 (1992), 381.

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid.*, 380. As discussed in Rocca, Angelo *De canonizatione sanctorum commentarius* (Rome: 1601) which dedicates an entire chapter to the problem of discerning acts of God from those of the devil.

infallible truth pronounced by Christ our Lord, who said that whoever believed in him would perform the same miracles'.<sup>980</sup>

Most miracles included elements popular in the gospels such as water, wine, and bread. Blessed Gerard, for example, was caught red-handed feeding the besieging Christian armies by throwing bread from the walls of Jerusalem. When taken to the Muslim governor, still with his robe full of bread, the bread miraculously turned to stones. Later he would be brought again before the Governor, accused of having hidden great riches belonging to the Hospital. In a story reminiscent of that of St Lawrence, Bosio attributes the exact same words of the hero saint to Blessed Gerard: 'my treasures which you seek, are in the heavenly hands of the poor'.<sup>981</sup> He was similarly bound in chains and tortured. A very similar miracle was performed by St Flora, who was caught by the abbess feeding the poor with bread from the monastery in a time of famine. The abbess accused St Flora of depleting the monastery supplies in a time of great need and requested to see if it was bread that she was concealing in her mantle. The abbess was surprised to see that flowers fell instead of bread from the saint's unveiled mantle, and she is commonly referred to as Flora or Fleur in memory of this sign from God.<sup>982</sup> St Ubaldesca, just like Jesus at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) turned water into wine for some women who asked her for water to quench their thirst.<sup>983</sup> (Fig. 54)

Similar miracles were attributed to St Ugo, Commander of Genoa,<sup>984</sup> who struck water out of a rock for a woman who washed clothes at the Infirmary, and who had to walk a long distance to get fresh water. This act is reminiscent of Moses and the rock in Horeb (Exodus 17:6), as Bosio himself notes.<sup>985</sup> St Ugo is usually associated with another miracle, one that evokes Jesus in the tempest (Matt 8:24).

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<sup>980</sup> Bosio, *Le Immagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 35 : '*...che si come l'infallibile Verita' Christo Signor nostro disse, che chiunque credera' in lui, fara' gl'istessi Miracoli , ch'egli fece e anche maggiori...*'

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; '*Facultates meas, quas requires, in Coelestis Thesaurus manus Pauperum deportauerunt.*'

<sup>982</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.

<sup>984</sup> Saint Ugo also transformed water into wine on one occasion. *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>985</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



Figure 54: *Miracle of St Ubaldesca* (Taddeo Baldini, second half of the seventeenth century, Chiesa di San Giovannino - Florence) (Cod. Naz. 0900191182)

One day he noticed a ship at the point of sinking. 'Out of compassion, he rapidly descended from the tower, with tears in his eyes, he stepped into the sea up to his knees, and raising his eyes towards the heavens, he made the sign of the cross at the ship. At that moment, the seas and winds were still, and the ship entered safe in Port.'<sup>986</sup> On another occasion, St Ugo liberated a man from an evil spirit, as did Jesus on many occasions, as well as his apostles and

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<sup>986</sup> *Ibid.*, 60: '...mosso a compassione grandissima, velocemente scese dalla torre e con molte lagrime, e singulti entro' nel mare, fin'al ginocchio; et alzando gli occhial cielo, fece verso la nave il Segno della Croce. E subito si raffreno' l'impeto de'venti e dell'ondel e tranquillandosi il mare, la Nave entro in Porto salva ...'

many great saints.<sup>987</sup> St Toscana's miracles also included raising people from the dead, something which was believed to be possible only through God's power, and which is a direct attribute of sanctity. Her biography echoes that of other great saints of Christianity such as St Helen and St Rita of Cascia. Just like the great saints and mystics, she too was tormented by the devil: on one occasion in particular, three young men, 'incited by a demonic spirit'<sup>988</sup> went to her house with ill intent, but before they could act on their evil thoughts, all three fell dead, only to be resurrected by Toscana and converted. Conversion of sinners is another attribute of great saints; on yet another occasion, Toscana converted another group of young men who had stolen her mantle after mass. They attempted to divide it between them<sup>989</sup> until suddenly their arms were paralysed. They returned to Toscana begging for mercy, at which point she healed them, and they abandoned their old sinful ways.<sup>990</sup>

Aside from these signs in life, the most powerful (and important) miracles were those accomplished after death. For most of these saints, their shrines and relics became powerful tools of healing, and many miracles were thought to have taken place even during public rituals. The shrine of Blessed Garcia Martinez in Leça, Portugal, was an important milestone along the Portuguese way to Santiago de Compostela. Bosio mentioned how an Infanta of Portugal,<sup>991</sup> accompanied by the bishops of Viseu, Coimbra and Porto, stopped to pray for three days at the shrine of Blessed Martinez on her way back from Compostela. The suggestion that the tomb of the saintly Hospitaller commander formed part of a sacred itinerary comes from Bosio, who mentioned that after these three days, the Infanta wanted to proceed to visit the *Santo Lenho* of Moreira, but her departure was interrupted by a man who said had just been healed by Blessed Martinez. This man could not walk without crutches, his legs were too weak to hold his weight, however, he prayed so hard at the tomb of the Hospitaller that he fell asleep, only to wake up healed.<sup>992</sup> The saint's shrine was seen to be often capable of conjuring the same acts that the saint performed in life, one of them being

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<sup>987</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. It does not imply they were possessed, simply that their actions served a tool for the devil to torment this saintly woman.

<sup>989</sup> Another similarity to the soldiers at the foot of the Cross, who each wanted a share of his robe.

<sup>990</sup> Bosio, *Le Imagini de' Beati e Santi della Sacra Religione*, 50.

<sup>991</sup> He claims it was Leonora, sister of John of Portugal, but since he did not give dates and there were many infantas with that name, it is not clear whom he was referring to precisely. It is also possible that he was referring to Eleonora of Viseu (1458-1525), cousin and future wife of John II; Bosio, *de' Beati e Santi*, 100.

<sup>992</sup> Bosio, *De' Beati e Santi*, 101.



the power of mediation and social justice. The same Portuguese saint performed another miracle, at the behest of a woman who was wrongly suspected of cheating on her husband, a blacksmith. To prove her innocence, she prayed Gracia Martinez and then proceeded to take a red-hot plough blade from her husband's forge with her bare hands, and walked with it to the saint's shrine, placing it at his tomb as a sign of her virtue, where it remained for a long time.<sup>993</sup> Bosio was not merely recounting the saint's power of reconciliation, which stretched into the afterlife, but was also arguing in favour of the knight's purity in life, as only a man of virtue could bring out the virtue in others.

Returning to Burke's argument, it is useful to think about how saints matched with roles. It is no coincidence that no fewer than 31 of the 55 saints officially canonised between 1588 and 1767 were saints who were either born or died in the sixteenth century, meaning that those five categories of sainthood that the sixteenth century so profusely produced (founders, missionaries, charity-makers, leaders and mystics), remained core models for imitation throughout the whole Counter-Reformation period. On the other hand, Burke points out that the absence of purely 'theologian saints'<sup>994</sup> and the reluctance of officially canonising some of the many martyrs of the period, is just as indicative of the ambivalence that Rome had with regard to certain criteria. While the previous sections already established that Bosio too was attempting to model his chosen eleven individuals on the same typologies,<sup>995</sup> it is equally important to appreciate that, since he was doing so with the Grand Master's blessing, the *Imagini de' Beati e Santi* was also attempting to inspire any future Hospitaller saints to follow one of these paths, which in themselves were varying interpretations of the Hospitaller vocation.

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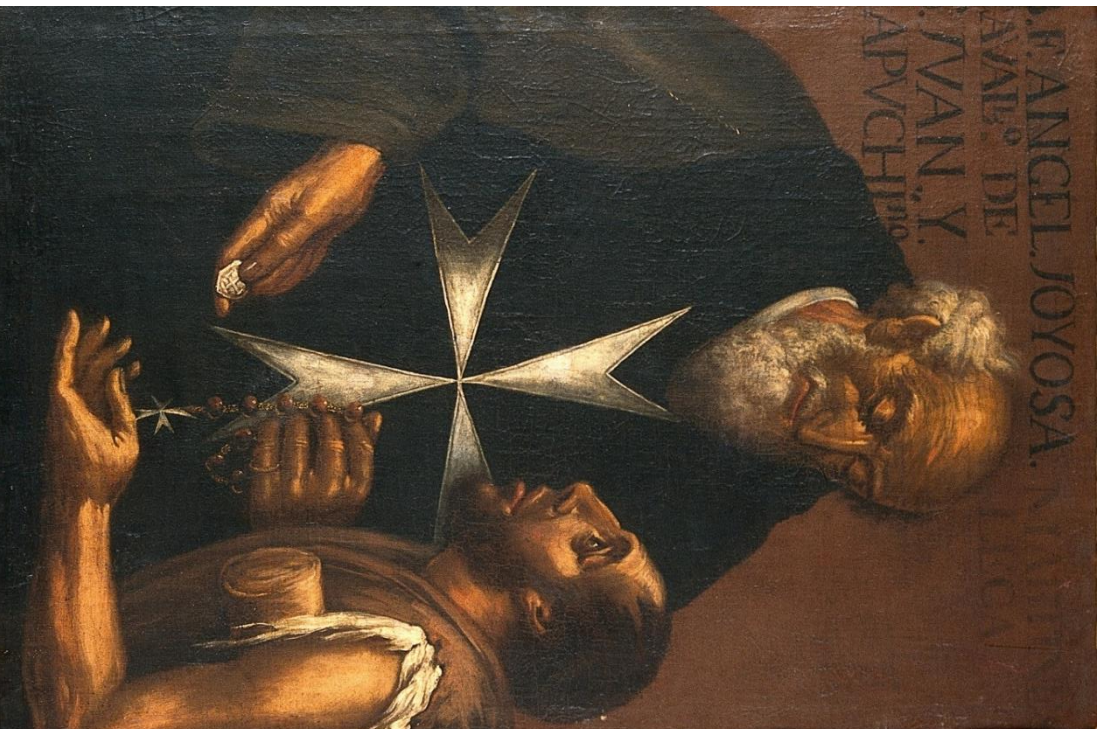
<sup>993</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>994</sup> Except for Nicholas of Cusa who was proposed for canonisation but did not achieve it: Burke, 139.

<sup>995</sup> Burke's 'good pastor' model could easily be applied to the likes of Ugo of Genoa, Gherland of Poland, Garcia Martinez, and Pietro da Imola who also distinguished themselves as good commanders and administrators of the Order's lands.



Figure 55: (left) Blessed Garcia Martinez with the Lame Beggar and the Woman with the Plough (After Bosio, late seventeenth/eighteenth century, Neapolitan?) [Courtesy - Heritage Malta]; (right) Fra Angel Joyeuse (d. 1608) in the iconographic style of Garcia Martinez (seventeenth century, Wellcome Museum – London)



## ***Sacred Erudition - On the shoulder of giants***

This chapter has so far given a lot of attention to the work of Giacomo Bosio, the reason being that his work left a lasting impact on the way sanctity was visually and verbally documented throughout the rest of the seventeenth century. The few printed hagiographies he had available, such as Silvano Razzi's *De Santi e Beati Toscani* (1593),<sup>996</sup> Orazio Diola's *History of the Franciscan Order in Italian* (1586), and in part, his communication with Ottavio Gaetani who was working on the saints of Sicily, prove that his contribution to the subject of saints of the Order was original and necessary. MS7 in the Aldobrandini (Bosio) papers include manuscript hagiographies from around 1619, comprising two *Vitae* of Ubaldesca, one of which is by Razzi and another a copy of 'Ms. A' published recently by Gabriele Zaccagnini,<sup>997</sup> a life of Ugo of Genoa, of Gherardo of Villamagna, and a final one of Garcia Martinez. Consequently, Bosio's work is quoted by several hagiographies on individual saints of the Order produced in the latter half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To mention a few examples, Paolo Salvetti included the life of St Ubaldesca in his *Vite dei Santi Pisani*, and the title reads '...cavate dal libro delle Croniche di Malta di Bosio'.<sup>998</sup>

Ottaviano Monzecchi's 1709 '*Vita del B. Gherardo da Villamagna*'<sup>999</sup> opens with a short literature review, that credits Giacomo Bosio as a main hagiographic source on the life of the hermit knight. Giuseppe Maria Brocchi followed up on this half a century later with another *Vita*,<sup>1000</sup> which work was done for and dedicated to Grand Master Emanuel Pinto. Interestingly, 'beato' Gherardo in Montezecchi became 'San' in Brocchi's work. Pinto had obtained a relic of the hand of Gherardo and Brocchi wanted to mark this occasion with a new hagiography that also included a frontispiece of the dying saint. This relationship between the

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<sup>996</sup> Bosio, *Dell' Istoria*, Vol. 1, 150; 'come si legge nell'Istoria della Santissima sua (Ubaldesca) vita, scritta ultimamente assai diligentemente dal Reverendo Abate Don Silvano Razzi dell'Ordine Camaldolense; e stampata in Firenze, alla quale mi rimetto.'

<sup>997</sup> Zaccagnini, 16-18, full text 196-242.

<sup>998</sup> Nevertheless, Gabriele Zaccagnini argues that despite the reference to Bosio in the title, the work is more closely associated with that of Razzi: Zaccagnini, 13.

<sup>999</sup> Ottaviano Monzecchi, *Vita del B. Gherardo da Villamagna, Frate Servente de'Cav. Di Malta, e Religioso del Terz'Ord. di S.Francesco*, (Firenze, 1709), 3.

<sup>1000</sup> Giuseppe Maria Brocchi, *Vita di S. Gherardo da Villamagna* (Lucca, 1750); the frontispiece is dedicated to the knight Fra Ferdinando Capponi, highlighting the patronage of individual knights as well as a key feature of hagiographic research.

hagiography, imagery, and relics is also consistent with Bosio's intentions during the Verdalle and Wignacourt magistracies more than a century and a half earlier.

The work that shows the strongest influence from Bosio is Domenico Maria Curione's *Glorioso Trionfo della Sacrosanta Religione*, published in Naples in 1619<sup>1001</sup> with a Spanish version published in the same year in Barcelona. Curione produced this work that, at face value seems very similar to Bosio's in intent, with the aim of pleasing his patron Cesare Firrao, who had two family members who were knights of Malta. Curione, a Dominican from Milan, was in contact with two knights of Malta in Naples – Fra Teseo Cavagliati, the Order's *Receiver* for that Priory (whom we've mentioned in connection with the distribution of *Terra Sigillata* in Mantova) and Fra Pietro Francesco Croce<sup>1002</sup> – who told him everything about the Order and its history and must have exhorted him to write this book. The Dominican obtained a copy of Bosio's *Dell'Istoria* from one of these two knights.<sup>1003</sup> Curione's book looks like a highlight from the Order's history, with the first sections focusing on individuals who distinguished themselves and the second on events where the Order triumphed against the odds. In the biographic part, Curione quotes extensively, at times word for word from Bosio, especially from his sections on the saints of the Order. He chose a few examples of saintly individuals, including the same ones that Bosio chose, but highlighted a few more himself. He included the three knights from Picardie from the story of Our Lady of Liesse, Fra Charles Alemand Rochechenard, a great patron of religious materiality for the Order,<sup>1004</sup> Fra Domenico d'Alemagna,<sup>1005</sup> Fra Raimondo di Lestura,<sup>1006</sup> Grand Master Helion de Villeneuve,<sup>1007</sup> and the less saintly Grand Master Heredia for the same reasons.<sup>1008</sup> Though he never claimed any saintly titles for these, he still lauded their saintly intentions.

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<sup>1001</sup> Curione d'Asso, Domenico Maria, *Il Glorioso Trionfo della Sacrosanta Religione Militare...*(Napoli: 1619); D'Avenia, Fabrizio, 'When the Past Makes Saints, The knights of Malta from Sinners to Martyrs in Il Glorioso trionfo della sacrosanta religion militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano (1619)' in Braghi and Dainese (eds.), *War and Peace in the Religious Conflicts of the Long Sixteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2023), 167-188.

<sup>1002</sup> Curione, *Address to Grand Master Wignacourt in the prefaces*, no pag.

<sup>1003</sup> The first editions of the volumes without the illustrations, since Curione met the knights before 1617, when Bosio was still collecting information for his illustrated editions and the *Beati e Santi*.

<sup>1004</sup> Curione, 86-91.

<sup>1005</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>1006</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>1007</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>1008</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-93.

Despite the *Glorioso Trionfo* being essentially a recycled version of Bosio, the general layout that Curione offers slightly changes the tone of the work when compared to Bosio's *De' Beati e Santi* since the underlying theme in Curione is more that of martyrdom. On the other hand, Curione does not seem to have intended for his work to have any devotional or liturgical value, but rather a historical one. He did use 'santo', 'beato', and 'martire', but generally kept away from the hagiographical setting that Bosio was aiming for through his illustrated editions. That said, Curione's emphasis on reprinting Bosio's list of fatalities of the siege of 1565 reiterates the longing for a Hospitaller *Martyrologium*, a need that would only be addressed by Mathieu Goussancourt in his *Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean* in 1643.<sup>1009</sup>

More monumental from the liturgical point of view was Bosio's contribution to what is the biggest collection of hagiographies to date, the Bollandist's *Acta Sanctorum*. This monumental task, running in several volumes, was intended to provide a more comprehensive catalogue of saints.<sup>1010</sup> What the first Bollandists started (Rosweyde and Bolland) was so impressive because their work was based on collaborative research on an international scale that was unprecedented in the seventeenth century. The Jesuit Herbert Rosweyde was initially interested in copying *Vitae Sanctorum's* old, forgotten, often semi-legendary saints. By 1607 he had gathered enough of these to send to Roberto Bellarmino with a plan to gather even more, but the latter shot down the idea. Not only was there too much work for Rosweyde to do in a lifetime but some of these old stories were best left unpublished for their lack of historical trustworthiness. Nevertheless, the Jesuit General Aquaviva approved of the project, which as the name implies, would outlive Rosweyde (d.1629) and take the name of his successor John Bolland. Bolland inherited from Rosweyde the general layout of the opus, namely that it be organised according to the calendar year, with the hagiographies placed under their corresponding feast day (or day when their bodies were discovered or translated). Each month would run in multiple volumes, as well as multiple editions since all the while, new saints were being discovered as well as ordained. There was no way one hagiographer could cope with the sheer amount of manuscript material to write hundreds of hagiographies.

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<sup>1009</sup> Mathieu de Goussancourt, *Martyrologe des Chevaliers de S. Jean de Hierusalem dits de Malte* (Paris: 1643).

<sup>1010</sup> For a short, general overview on the work of the Bollandists, see: Knowles, M.D., 'The Great Historical Enterprises: The Bollandists,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1958, Vol. 8 (1958), 147-166.

Bolland would die on the job as well, and it was with his successor, Daniel Papebroek (1659) that the legacy of the Bollandists really started making a mark on historiography, particularly in the May volumes which is where Giacomo Bosio and the nun of the Order Ubaldesca make an appearance.<sup>1011</sup>

Papebroek, more than his predecessors, exemplified the critical reading of primary and secondary source material for hagiographies, building a narrative on archival research much as one would do with any piece of historical narrative. For this reason, he wanted to make sure to collect all the evidence he could on each saint. It is not surprising to discover from a series of letters conserved at the Biblioteca Medici Laurenziana (Florence),<sup>1012</sup> that helping him in this task was the scientist, Francesco Redi.<sup>1013</sup> In this correspondence with Papebroek, who seems to have enjoyed the patronage of the Grand Duke of Tuscany,<sup>1014</sup> Redi is shown to have been one of a number of field researchers collecting bibliographic material for the Bollandists. Among the saints that Papebroek and Redi discussed in this *carteggio*, we find St Ubaldesca Calcinaia, whose hagiography by Silvano Razzi (1627 ed.) they were in the act of transcribing. In truth, Papebroek was in contact with a few other Tuscan scholars such as Francesco Maria Ceffini, in search of an even older hagiography, but they seem to have located only Razzi's, Bosio's, and Ferrari's. Not only did the Bollandists include Ubaldesca in the *Acta*, but they also reproduced exact copies of the two portraits of the saint that Bosio had obtained through Fra Francesco dell'Antella and Fra Ottavio Cevoli in 1619.<sup>1015</sup>

Another reference to Bosio's work can be found in Vincenzo Venuti's *Dell'Esistenza, Professione e Culto di S. Nicasio Martire*.<sup>1016</sup> It seems that a century and a half after the great debate on whether saints that were not in the *Martyrologium* (which had run in a number of editions by that point) could be depicted was still effecting the universality of the cult of

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<sup>1011</sup> Henschen, Godfried, Papebroek, Daniel et al., *Acta Sanctorum Maii collecta digesta et illustrata*, Tomus VI (days 25-28 May) (Antwerp: 1688), 854.

<sup>1012</sup> Biblioteca Medici Laurenziana, Redi, Redi 203, f.185rv, 187-189v.

<sup>1013</sup> On Redi and other Tuscan researchers who helped Papebroek, see: Allegría, Simone, 'La stampa incompiuta degli eruditi aretini (XVII secolo)', in *Dal manoscritto al libro stampato. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Roma, 10-12 dicembre 2009)*, (Spoleto: CISAM, 2010), 225-238.

<sup>1014</sup> The work is in fact dedicated to Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany and Francesco Redi's employer.

<sup>1015</sup> *Acta Sanctorum Maii*, 859.

<sup>1016</sup> Venuti, Vincenzo, 'Dell' Esistenza, Professione e Culto di S. Nicasio Martire' in Pietro Bentivenga, *Opuscoli di autori Siciliani*, Tomo Primo, Lib. 7 (Palermo: 1762), 62-63.

Nicasio.<sup>1017</sup> He claimed that everyone in Sicily knew about this saint, and yet of six saints by that name, four of which were included in the *Martyrologium*, none corresponded to the one about which Bosio wrote. As Venuti writes: 'Should in this case their altars be [?] suddenly removed, their Images disposed of one by one, and the piety of the faithful disturbed, their cult which addresses the ideals of sainthood, albeit very old, prohibited? Of course not.'<sup>1018</sup> There is, on the other hand, a stark contrast between the methodological approaches of Bosio and Venuti, as is natural considering that the latter was producing work that was more typical of the Enlightenment. Venuti's circle of hagiographers/historians included none other than Ludovico Antonio Muratori and the Order's historian Sebastiano Paoli. Paoli had discovered and published a few documents on the saint,<sup>1019</sup> which evidence had not been available to Giacomo Bosio at the time of his writing. Additionally, Muratori, who was researching the history of medieval Sicily, supplied Venuti with the background information to anchor St Nicasio in a historical setting, including a full family tree of the Burgio family (the family of St Nicasius and his brother St Ferrandinus) from the times of Count Roger to the seventeenth century.<sup>1020</sup>

A detailed reading of Venuti's hagiography falls outside the chronology of this study, yet it is being mentioned here to highlight certain aspects of continuity and change in the field of hagiographical research ushered in by Giacomo Bosio. Furthermore, St Nicasius was the only martyr of the Order that Bosio included in his cycle of saints, even though throughout his works, he does mention a great number of Hospitallers who died fighting the enemies of the Catholic Church, stopping just short of declaring them martyr saints. As we shall see soon, Bosio was laying the groundwork for a Hospitaller *Martyrologium*.

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<sup>1017</sup> Venuti also included a reproduction of an old painting of the saint from the church of Caccamo.

<sup>1018</sup> Venuti, 10.

<sup>1019</sup> Sebastiano Paoli, *Codice Diplomatico del Sagro Militare Ordine Gerosolimitano...* (Lucca: 1733), Diploma 78, 509.

<sup>1020</sup> Venuti, 16.





Figure 56: *Madonna di Costantinopoli with St Rosalia, St Joseph, St Roche, St Rose, St Januarius and St Nicasius* (Mattia Preti, 1656, Real Museo di Capodimonte)





Figure 57: Plague Saints of 1656, St Nicasius, Sts Cosmas and Damian, St Nicholas and St Roche

### ***Martyrdom in Hospitaller Piety***

In 1614, in Cagliari, Sardinia, excavations began to unearth a catacomb complex that had been used by the first Christians. As works progressed, an astounding number of bodies were discovered, most having some sort of epigraphic label, with the letters B.M. etched on the sepulchral slab. For Dionigio Bonfant, who published an extensive volume on this discovery a few years later, these two letters could only mean one thing, 'beatus martyr', with the status being pinned on some 300 plus of these bodies, most of which eventually found their way to convents and churches quite far away from their native Sardinia.<sup>1021</sup>

This discovery, and the festivities and ceremonies that naturally ensued, were far from an isolated event in Counter-Reformation Italy, or indeed anywhere else in Catholic Europe. Indeed, Katrina Olds's paper 'Ambiguities of the Holy'<sup>1022</sup> sheds light on a discovery of relics in Arajona in Andalucia, Spain in 1628, highlighting the historical, theological, and procedural complications that often accompanied the authentication of holy bones. Olds used the Arajona case to demonstrate how these discoveries often dug up more than simply bones, as they involved a deeper dilemma at the heart of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. In this case, the cults of Saints Bonosius and Maximianus were based on a freshly discovered chronicle that said they had been martyred around the year 308CE, but their burial place was unknown. This chronicle, discovered by a Jesuit, was deemed authentic at the time,<sup>1023</sup> so much so that the two saints were added to the revised *Martyrologium*. What makes the Arajona case relevant to this chapter is the role that written historical or hagiographic material had in shaping public devotion and perception of sanctity. Irrespective of the historical validity of the '*legenda*' itself, the historian must give due credit to the strong behavioural impact that martyrs had on the community, especially one like Arajona, which was mostly associated with the Muslim heritage of the last kings of Granada. Arajonans started praying to God to show them where the burial site of these martyrs was. Testimonies attest to a number of these

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<sup>1021</sup> Simon Ditchfield, 'Martyrs on the Move: Relics as vindicators of local diversity in the Tridentine Church' in Diana Wood ed., *Martyrs and Martyrologies* (Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1993), 283.

<sup>1022</sup> Katrina Olds, 'The Ambiguities of the Holy: Authenticating Relics in Seventeenth-Century Spain', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol.65, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 135-184.

<sup>1023</sup> Despite the initial interest in this chronicle, by the eighteenth century it was already considered unreliable, parts of it possibly even forgeries: Olds, 136.

signs, among them apparitions of Roman soldiers, light, tolling of bells, and sweet celestial odours. The sense of anticipation for the discovery of these relics was so high that the populace could not wait for the bishop's approval to begin an official search and simply started digging away. Not long after, some human remains and what were believed to be instruments of martyrdom (shackles, nails, a winch and fragments of steel) were unearthed. The excavations continued for a few years, and more human remains were brought to light.<sup>1024</sup> These testimonies and others from similar case-studies have two things in common; a multi-sensory experience and, more importantly, a communal one. Smell was a significant identifier, leading to the term "*odore di santità*" becoming standard terminology to refer to individuals who died in reputation of sanctity.<sup>1025</sup> The search for older Christian roots provided a unique opportunity for the community to reframe their spiritual identity through history, in a very similar way that Antonio Bosio would do for Rome and Gian Francesco Abela for Malta.<sup>1026</sup>

This frenzy to discover martyrs did not rely solely on serendipity, but intrepid relic seekers had themselves gone into the uncharted subterranean catacombs, caves, and ruins, in search of lost earthly remains of the first Christian martyrs. Antonio Bosio was a proto-archaeologist who invested in looking for martyrs in catacombs and this earned him the nickname of 'Christopher Columbus' of subterranean Rome.<sup>1027</sup> Perhaps the most significant of Antonio Bosio's discoveries in Rome was that of the remains of St Cecilia in Trastevere in 1599. It caused such excitement among the population of Rome, that Pope Clement VIII himself, bedridden with gout, came out to officiate the translation of the saint's relics. This is how Antonio Bosio, an eyewitness, described the scene:

'It was above all the matrons and young girls of the highest Roman nobility, swept up by their love for their virgin fellow citizen, who huddled there,

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<sup>1024</sup> Olds, 136-7.

<sup>1025</sup> Laven, Mary, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 227-244

<sup>1026</sup> Gian Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta Isola nel Mare Siciliano con le sue Antichità, e altre Notizie* (Malta: Bonacota, 1647); Abela uses history, archaeology, and toponyms mostly to advance a claim to Malta's antique Christian roots. This is made evident from the frontispiece image of St Paul, believed to have Christianised Malta around 60CE.

<sup>1027</sup> For an in-depth study of Antonio Bosio, his times, and work, see: Cecalupo, Chiara, *Antonio Bosio, La Roma Sotterranea e I Primi Collezionisti di Antichità Cristiane*, Vol. 1 Profile Storico (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archaeologia Cristiana, 2020).

lingered and prostrated themselves as supplicant worshippers. They did not get up again until dusk called them home at the end of the day when they went with the impatient desire For returning.... with what singing they praised her, with what ardent prayers they addressed her, and just how blessed and happy they all were that in their own time this most chaste martyr should be offered to their sight in person.'<sup>1028</sup>

Such fervour with martyrs and their relics might have gone out of hand, and although it was believed that God had providentially revealed these holy bodies for veneration in a time of need, the Papal Curia in Rome was weary of abuse of this grace. The Church could not allow itself once more to become the target of Protestants who had ridiculed Catholics for being too ready to believe in the authenticity of relics. Nevertheless, the Church was very much in need of these bodies, to prove an element of '*semper eadem*' or continuity with the first group of Christians. It sought to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the other denominations as the one true 'mother' or apostolic church, and no one had a better claim than one who possessed the physical remains of the apostles, saints, and martyrs.

Curiosity about the lives, and more importantly the death, of the countless nameless martyrs that were discovered in the catacombs, sparked many hagiographies to be written and published, and although these stories were mostly fictitious right down to the names of the martyrs themselves, they became very popular, mainly because the readers felt an affinity towards their foreparents in faith. Early modern society was afflicted by religious strife between Protestants and Catholics, first in Germany, then France, England and the Low Countries, along with the continuous fear due to the spread of Islam. It was just as easy to die for one's religious beliefs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as it was for the first martyrs during the Roman persecution. It was precisely this effect that the Church had hoped for and thus made full use of the visual and literary language of martyrdom to urge its faithful not to give in to persecution, and remain loyal to Rome.

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<sup>1028</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, 'An Early Christian School of Sanctity in Tridentine Rome' in Simon Ditchfield ed., *Christianity and Community in the West; Essays for John Bossy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 186.

It is this ideology that was often transmitted through the very graphical examples of martyrdom produced by Mannerist and Baroque artists for the Roman Catholic churches. One might be tempted to say that these works of art are too morbid. Others might assimilate their morose content with a general fascination with the theatrical which was so typical of early modern society. This in part is true but does not incorporate the whole meaning behind such artistic expression. Catholicism in general, and the Order of St John in particular, intended to make use of what is called '*peinture parlant*' or '*peinture spirituelle*',<sup>1029</sup> that is, the use of art to impart the teaching of the gospel, and to stimulate devotion in the hearts of those most obdurate to piety. Mary Laven describes this as the product of 'a competitive phase of Catholicism, propped up, it might appear, as much by marble pillars and gilded statuary, as by the pious simplicity that the Catholic reformers had once invoked.'<sup>1030</sup>

Transmitting the notion that members of the Order shed their blood in defence of the Church was as pivotal as winning the siege itself, as it rebranded the Order according to Tridentine standards. The knights made excellent use of the parallelism with the scriptures and with the first martyrs; in fact, they portrayed themselves as 'new Maccabees',<sup>1031</sup> a small band of men anointed by God to fight and die if necessary to defend the true faith. The possibility that one might die fighting for the Order was seen as an extension of the missionary zeal which was at the basis of the Hospitaller Rule. Martyrdom thus became a core notion in the Hospitaller vocation, and there is no doubt that all members of the Order, knights, chaplains and servants, were made aware of this.

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<sup>1029</sup> Ossa-Richardson, A. 'Image and Idolatry: the case of Louis Richeome' in *Method and Variation; Narrative in Early Modern French Thought*, Emma Gilby and Paul White (eds.) (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), 42.

<sup>1030</sup> Laven, Mary, 'Encountering the Counter-Reformation', *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2006), 707.

<sup>1031</sup> For instance, Curione, 19, 80; Bosio, *Dell'Istoria* Vol. 1, 207.



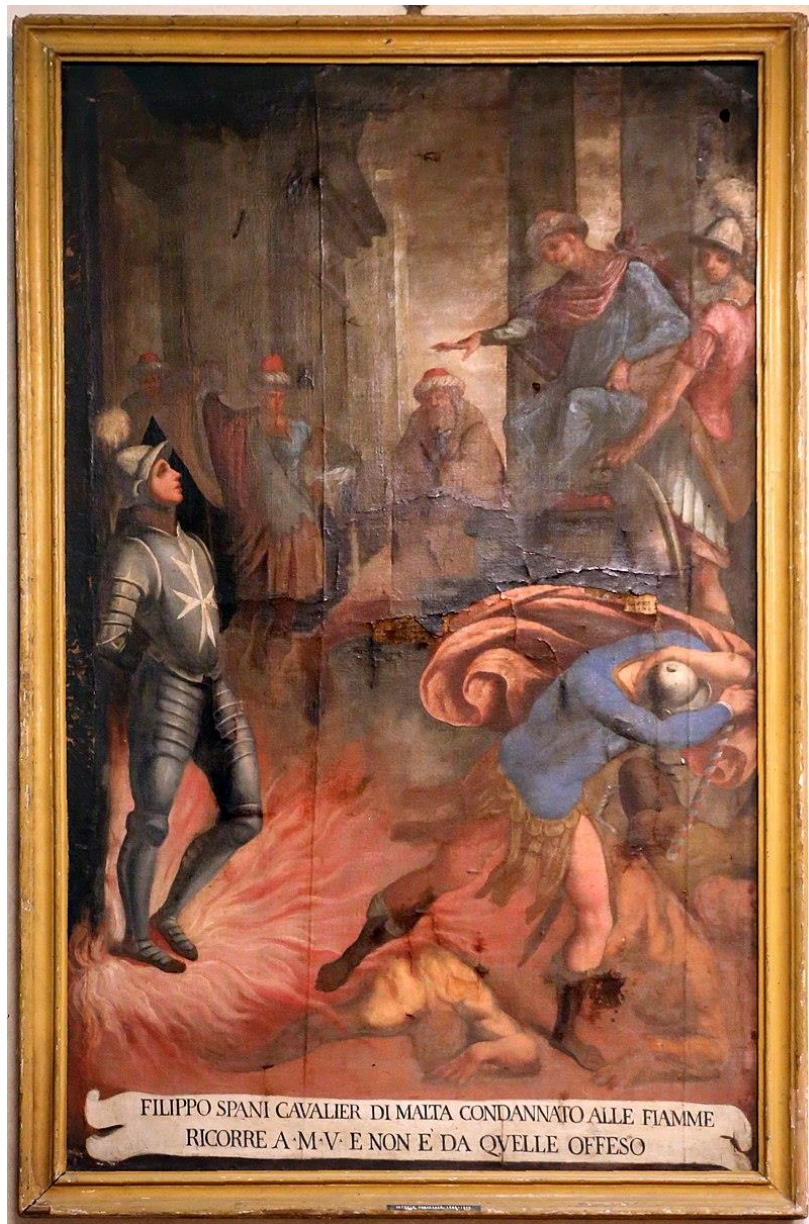


Figure 58: *Fra Filippo Spani and the Miracle of the Annunciation* (Antonio Circignani il Pomarancio, 1570-1630, SSma. Annunziata - Florence)

In the case of martyr saints, we see history and theology become even more intertwined in comparison with other *Vitae Sanctorum*. Whereas the timeframe of the lives of some confessor saints seems to be ambiguous, in some cases even historically elusive, the focus in martyrdom is death within a pre-established historical context, be it the Roman persecutions of Diocletian, at the hands of heretics, or during a crusade or part of a missionary expedition. For the Order of St John, it was even more important to stress the historical context of this human sacrifice as a means of demonstrating their continuous service to Christianity. This fact



was evident in the lamentations about the absence of members of the Order in the *Martyrologium Romanum* as discussed above and would become pivotal in the language the Order adopted, be it verbally or visually. To this effect, the Order's approach to sanctity throughout the seventeenth century started to feature martyrs more frequently. One such highlight takes the form of art executed by Mattia Preti (1613-1699) in the Conventual Church, completed a year after the first centenary of the Siege. Preti chose to depict saints and heroes of the Order of St John as supporting characters to the main theme of the ceiling of the church which represented the life of St John the Baptist, patron of the Order. It is interesting how, out of the twenty-seven heroes and saints of the Order represented by Preti in the Vault of St John's Conventual Church, ten were directly related to the Siege of 1565; except for the Grand Master Jean de Vallette, the remaining nine are 'martyrs'.<sup>1032</sup> In the vault as well as in a separate cycle of saints he painted for the oratory within the same church, Preti included all of Bosio's *Santi e Beati*, some even more than once. In most cases, Preti did not even depart from Bosio's descriptions. In the case of the 1565 martyrs, he represented them in such a way that was evocative of the corresponding excerpts from the *Della Istoria*. The other saints were simply a fresher take to the set that was already hanging in the Oratory, the same ones that Bosio reproduced, all the while keeping true to the original iconography with minor artistic licence in some cases. In sum, Preti's artistic strategy for St John's Church can be seen as a consolidation of the Order's approach to sanctity, from Bosio's efforts to collect the histories first, to the reproduction of pre-existing art as illustrations to those histories, their re-framing as collective hagiographies and ultimately as *peinture spirituelle* in the knights' holy of holies.

There are two angles from which one can study this 'full circle' of sanctity, with the public image of the Order and its service to Christendom being just one. The second, and possibly the principal reason why the Order went to such great lengths to document its saints and martyrs, was for them to serve as a means of fostering the next generation of holy warriors. Whether their efforts were fruitful can be debated, but what the historian can do is assess how this strategy changes when the focus shifts from an outwardly universal promulgation of saints to an in-house pedagogic tool. Christian theology sees martyrdom as a second baptism, in blood instead of water, which redeems the individual from all sins previously committed

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<sup>1032</sup> De Giorgio, Cynthia, *Mattia Preti: Saints and Heroes for the Knights of Malta* (Malta: Midsea, 2014).

and promises eternal salvation. For many knights, particularly the less pious ones, this was a 'bonus', the opportunity to erase a lifetime of sin at the very moment of death, just like the penitent thief who was crucified with Christ.

More curious is the inclusion of two very violent men among the circle of saints depicted by Mattia Preti in the main nave of the Conventual church, Fra Leone Strozzi and Fra Aleramo Parpaglia. Murderers in life but ruthlessly efficient in the fight against the common enemy, these endeavours were, in the eyes of the Order, still saintly. These men did not really understand the meaning of piety but understood only too well that they were living in violent times. Leone Strozzi was a very influential member of the Order of St John, extremely powerful and ruthless. He had orchestrated several high-profile assassinations, including those of Cosimo I de Medici and Andrea Doria, both of which failed, resulting in the arrest, torture, and execution of a few of his henchmen, but not him. He was on the verge of being elected Grand Master had it not been for the last-minute change of mind of three crucial voters, who shifted their support to Claude de la Sengle. Strozzi would take revenge on these three by having them poisoned by the chemist Biagio Pesci. Fra Aleramo Parpaglia happened to be the brother of Fra Bernardo, one of Fra Leone and Biagio Pesci's victims, and he in turn avenged his brother by stabbing Pesci to death. It was not his first kill. Aleramo Parpaglia was already in hiding for having killed another man in an argument. Parpaglia would only resurface in 1565 when he sought to return to Malta amid the siege with a daring plot to murder the Ottoman leader Piali Pasha. He had planned to surrender to the Turks with the hope of appearing before Piali, at which point he hoped to get an opportunity to kill him, yet when he did surrender, his captors beheaded him on the spot without giving him his desired opportunity. This foolhardy plan went down in history as a daring martyrdom and earned Parpaglia a spot amongst the great saints, overshadowing his sinister past. It is more difficult to justify the inclusion of Leone Strozzi among the saints depicted by Preti since the threatening conspirator and murderer did not even die at the hands of the Turks or Protestants, he died in a skirmish outside the Tuscan village of Scarlino.<sup>1033</sup> There where

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<sup>1033</sup> Martelli, Francesco, 'Leone Strozzi' in *DBI* Vol. 94 (2019); URL: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/leone-strozzi\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/leone-strozzi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) [accessed on 8/5/2023].

without a doubt, various other, better-suited individuals who fit the criteria of martyrdom, who also closely reflected the restrained behaviour to which the knights should have aspired.

Not all 'martyrs' needed a violent death to wash away the sins of a violent life. In the case of Fra Agostino Grimaldi e Rosso, martyrdom was the crowning glory of a saintly life, as well as a life-long personal ambition. Agostino's young admission into the Order meant that he was bred as a knight of Malta, and this influenced all aspects of his life, particularly his education. Agostino was born on the feast of the discovery of the Cross, (3 May). It was not difficult for the author of his *vita*, the Discalced Carmelite Giovanni dall'Epifania,<sup>1034</sup> to see in this a parallel with Agostino's later life. '*...he would grow under the sign of the Cross of Jerusalem, wishing equally to exalt it, and to fix it on the walls of the enemy.*'<sup>1035</sup> For the author, everything in Agostino's life seemed to point him in one direction, martyrdom. The rhetoric used oscillates between Agostino's two baptisms, that in water, and at his death, the baptism in blood; '*..he was accompanied to the baptismal font to do his first profession of faith, cleansing himself with water; he who fighting against the enemies would wash himself with blood, an act that would be celebrated everywhere by the trumpets of fame.*'<sup>1036</sup>

He joined the Order as a minor, and we are told that as a boy, he was kept informed of any recent naval exploits of the knights. Since some of the greatest victories were often published in pamphlets, it is safe to assume that Agostino had access to such literature. All this deeply influenced the boy, as we read in a transcription of a short school essay he wrote, in which he pretended to be on one of the galleys, chasing the Ottomans.<sup>1037</sup> Agostino's mother often noticed him walking round a room, all collected and behaving strangely. One time she asked him why he was all alone, to which he replied that he was not alone, '*I am with my Guardian Angel, saying my prayers.*' The mother insisted that she wanted to know what kind of prayers he was saying, and Agostino replied, '*mental prayer consists of meditation of some spiritual*

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<sup>1034</sup> The feast was moved in 1960 and is now celebrated on 14 September: Dell'Epifania, 18.

<sup>1035</sup> Dell'Epifania, 18; '*...dovendo poi inalzarsi con l'Insegna della Croce Gerosolimitana, desiderando insieme esaltarla, e piantarla su le mura nemiche...*'

<sup>1036</sup> Dell'Epifania, 20-21; '*...fosse accompagnato al fote Battismale per fare la prima professione della Fede, lavandosi con l'acqua; chi combattendo contro I nemici di quella dovea lavarsi col sangue, per essere publicato da per tutto con le trombe della Fama...*'

<sup>1037</sup> Dell'Epifania, *L'Idea del Cavaliere*, 40.

theme such as the *Passion of Our Lord and other similar topics*.<sup>1038</sup> As mentioned earlier in this work, Agostino received his education from the Jesuits of Modica, which explains the strong Ignatian influence in his approach to prayer. Should we choose to take Dell'Epifania's word *a prima facia*, Fra Agostino Grimaldi's case would be one of the best-documented cases for the implementation of a spiritual programme in the early formation of a 'Hospitaller child'. That said, even though Agostino was not the only Hospitaller 'minor', nor the only one to receive a Jesuit education, the *vita* still attempts to show a heroic value in prayer that went above and beyond what was expected for his age and vocation, a hallmark of the hagiographic style. In a letter written after the death of Agostino, his elder brother Vincenzo, a Jesuit priest, wrote to his father:

*'...I know that he was chosen by God when he was still very young...and I am an eye witness to this [holiness], since in the many years we were together as brothers, apart from our love and companionship, he was for me a great example, not only because he always kept away from any impurities, but because I always saw him enthusiastic to perform acts of piety, and what I was mostly struck with was his insistence in praying every day before going to bed, saying many verbal orations with great devotion, nor do I remember a single day that for any reason whatsoever he neglected to pray.'*<sup>1039</sup>

These verbal prayers consisted of the recital of the Office of the Virgin and the Rosary. He then recited the Office of St Christopher and finally the Office of the Dead for the souls in purgatory. The author believed that with all these prayers, a considerable amount for a child to say before going to sleep, the devil did not dare go close to his bed at night since the child was armed with so many spiritual weapons.<sup>1040</sup> Vincenzo added that to chastise himself, his

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<sup>1038</sup> Dell'Epifania, 39; *'...tutto spirito rispose: l'Oratione mentale facevasi quando la persona raccolta in se stessa, si metteva a ponderare qualche punto spirituale, e particolarmente della Passione del Signore, o d'altra materia somigliante.'*

<sup>1039</sup> Dell'Epifania, 43; *'...conoscendo che Iddio l'ellesse per se da' teneri anni...posso essere testimonio di veduta, perche in tanto tempo, che con lui si strettamente conversai, come con fratello, oltre modo da me amatissimo, e sempre compagno, hebbi sempre di che edificarmi, non solo per vederlo alieno da qualsivoglia imperfezione, ma per haverlo sempre positivamente veduto inclinatore all'opere pie, e quell che mi reca non poca moraviglia si è la perseveranza con che ogni sera prima d'andare a letto recitava non poche Orationi covali, con molta devotione, ne mi ricordo sera veruna, che per qualsivoglia affare habbi lui lasciato tali devotioni.'*

<sup>1040</sup> Dell'Epifania, 43; *'...il comun nemico dell'anime nostre non havea ardire d'avvicinarsi a quell letto combattere con le sue illusioni, quell gratioso figliuolo: poiche con tante armi spirituali prima d'andare a dormire s'havea fortificato la mente.'*

brother would often go to bed fully clothed, or change his linen sheets with rough woollen ones.<sup>1041</sup> It was a common belief that the body could be a source of temptation and evil, therefore by punishing the body, one hoped to keep the soul clean. Every Friday at three in the afternoon (the hour when Jesus died), Agostino had the habit of looking for a quiet spot and reciting the entire passion of Christ from the Gospel of St John on his knees.

Soon enough the time came for Agostino to leave for Malta to start his novitiate and take his vows. Two days before leaving, his father gave him a copy of the eulogy of Fra Rinaldo Bech la Bussierre written by the conventual chaplain Fra Fabrizio Cagliola.<sup>1042</sup> Fra Rinaldo Bech spent ten years in captivity in Tunis and after his redemption returned to Malta and died *in odore di santità*.<sup>1043</sup> This explains why Agostino had a conversation with his mother on the possibility of captivity and martyrdom; *'Imagine if on my way to Malta I were to be captured by Turks... and they would abuse me to convince me to hate our faith, I would have such a great opportunity, before setting foot in Malta to die a Martyr..'* to which his mother replied that this was not a nice thing to say to a mother who was already saddened by her son's departure.<sup>1044</sup> The mother's suffering is something that the author mentioned frequently, her solitude in pain is evocative of Lope de Vega's continuous evocation of the *Virgen de la Soledad* (Virgin of Solitude), an extremely popular Spanish invocation of the Virgin Mary.<sup>1045</sup> It is not surprising that in Spanish Sicily, the image of the suffering mother had the same devotional appeal.<sup>1046</sup>

On the day he left for Malta, 11 October 1657, Agostino gave his few possessions to his parents as a reminder of him.<sup>1047</sup> He gave two images of the *Agnus Dei* to his father. Dell'Epifania saw Agostino himself reflected in the image of the *Agnus Dei*; the sacrificial lamb killed for the salvation of many others. To his mother, he gave an image of St Christopher, the

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<sup>1041</sup> Dell'Epifania, 44.

<sup>1042</sup> Dell'Epifania, 61.

<sup>1043</sup> Pozzo, *Historia*, 740 (1625).

<sup>1044</sup> Dell'Epifania, 61; *'Oh piacesse a Iddio Signora Madre, che in questo passaggio per Malta foss'io preso da Turchi... che doppo se mi violentassero a detestare la nostra Fede, io haverei una si grande occasione, prima di mettere il piede in Malta di morire costantemente Martire...'*

<sup>1045</sup> See: Christian, William, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1981).

<sup>1046</sup> Carroll, Michael P., *Veiled Threats, the Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1996), 101.

<sup>1047</sup> Dell'Epifania, 62.

same one he kept next to his bed and prayed with every night. The prayer on the image read *'Saint Christopher who carried the great and the strong, save me from danger and a bad death.'* *'Save me from...a bad death'* is much more important than living a long life. His Jesuit educators would have undoubtedly introduced Fra Grimaldi to the works of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino on how to die well.<sup>1048</sup> Discourse of extreme sacrifices prompted his parents to try and convince him otherwise. In a letter sent a few days before his son's solemn profession, Giovanni Grimaldi told Agostino that if he had changed his mind on his vocation, he was welcome to return home without shame.<sup>1049</sup> In his reply, Agostino not only refused to do so, but reiterated that he did not fear being in harm's way; *'The dangers and hard work that our Religion [the Order] expects from us is nothing compared to the gratification I take from serving my Religion, and spilling my blood for the Holy Faith does not disturb my soul in the slightest, since I resolved to offer my life for the Religion...'*<sup>1050</sup>

Soon enough, Agostino was mortally wounded in Candia. Dell'Epifani's description of Fra Grimaldi's final moments alternates the imagery of blood, juxtaposed with descriptions of calm, beauty, and light.

*'He continued to repeat that had he known in what manner he would be mortally wounded, he would still have gone to land to do his duty and be shot again in defence of the Religion (the Order) and his faith; and so, he dies comforted by the hope in divine mercy. As he was gradually passing away, he begged the fellow knights to bury him in consecrated ground and they promptly promised to do so. Finally, hugging the cross on his chest, with tenderness gently kissing it, he remained conscious till the end, only his voice weakened by the large quantity of blood he had lost, with the names of Jesus, Mary on his lips, and in his heart, a smiling face so beautiful and as serene as ever, never had the summer sun set so happily, in the bright Orient of his tender age, and with the hope that his*

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<sup>1048</sup> Roberto Bellarmino, *Dell'Arte di Ben Morir* (Firenze, 1620).

<sup>1049</sup> Dell'Epifania, 86.

<sup>1050</sup> Dell'Epifania, 87, 27 September 1658; *'Li pericoli poi, travigli et appliacioni, ne'quali la nostra Religione c'applica, et impiega sono giustamente un nulla al sommo gusto ch'io tengo in servire la mia Religione, etiam col spargimento del proprio sangue, che procedendo per la Santa Fede, impression veruna non caggiona all'anumo mio, dato ch'io fossi più che sicuro in spendere la vita per detta mia Religione.'*

*exemplary life had brought to everyone, eclipsing forever on this earth to enjoy an everlasting dawn in paradise...'<sup>1051</sup>*

The same juxtaposition of blood, calm, beauty, and light is carried forward in Preti's decorative programme in St John's Conventual Church in Valletta. There is no doubt that with its pluri-centennial history, the Order's commissioners, working with Preti, were spoilt for choice when tasked with representing martyrdom, and even though Grimaldi is not represented anywhere in St John's, Dell'Epifania's poetics of the dual baptism in water and blood are.

The full list of martyrs of the Order and their presence in Hospitaller liturgy is less straightforward than the original set of 'Bosio saints'. The majority do not have feast days, nor were their relics venerated, with one exception. In a small chapel built in the church of St Michael in what was the Hospitaller Commandery of Ambel (Zaragoza) is preserved what is believed to be the head of Fra Melchior de Monserrat.<sup>1052</sup> The head is placed in a niche, surrounded by other relics,<sup>1053</sup> and two lambs, a clear reference to the patron saint of the Order, St John the Baptist. Monserrat is one of the heroes of the siege of 1565 and had willingly offered to serve in St Elmo in its final days. Melchior had been shot and subsequently buried under rubble, and Bosio wrote that when the siege was over and the fort was being cleared, the body of Fra Monserrat had been discovered still intact with his arms closed together as if in prayer.<sup>1054</sup> Mattia Preti subsequently painted him just as Bosio described him, reinforcing the idea that Bosio's account served as Preti's main point of reference. Archival

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<sup>1051</sup> Dell'Epifania, 156-157; *'Con gran contento più volte replicava, che se non avesse abbassato, tutto che avesse Saputo di certo che doveva essere a quella maniera mortalmente ferito, havrebbe di nuovo sceso, senza risparmiare la vita, in servizio, e difesa di quella Religione, e Fede, che professava; protestandosi perciò morire sommamente consolato con viva speranza dell'infinita misericordia: et allora, che già cominciava a poco a poco andar mancando, supplicò a quei mesti Cavalieri, che fosse seppellito in luogo sacro, di che fù assicurato: finalmente abbracciandosi sterttamente la Croce al petto, e più volte con somma tenerezza baggiandola; ceservando sempre retto l'uso di tutti sensi, con la voce solamente infievolita, per la copia del molto sangue dale ferrite versatoL co'nomi di Giesù, Maria nella Bocca, e nel cuore, con una faccia ridente vie più bella e serena chem ai, qual Sole estivo tramontò lieto, e sereno, nel lucido oriente dell'eta sue , e delle speranze, che co'suoi buoni costumi havevano tutti concepito, ecclessandosi per sempre in terra, per godere d'una beata aurora in Paradiso...'*

<sup>1052</sup> Gerrard, Christopher, Gutierrez, Alejanda, 'Melchor de Monserrat' *Tresures of Malta* 63, (Summer, 2015), 61-69.

<sup>1053</sup> Notably, the Lignum Crucis that had once belonged to Grand Master Juan Heredia, donated to Ambel in 1548, Gerrard and Gutierrez, 65.

<sup>1054</sup> Bosio III, 570.



research has not yet shed light as to whether the Order ever requested that the head of Fra Monserrat be transferred to Malta, such as was the case for some of the other saints. On the other hand, a letter discovered in the Parish Archives of Ambel<sup>1055</sup> has shown that the family wanted to obtain the 'relic', but the Prior of Ambel Fra Miguel Muñoz refused to give it to them. The letter, dating to the early seventeenth century, clearly refers to the martyred knight as the "saint brother Melchor". The reasons that Fra Muñoz gives for not accepting the family's request are that the knight had himself built the altar where his remains were being kept, and it was his desire that his head be sent there after his death. Furthermore, Muñoz claimed that the altar, dedicated to the Holy Christ, was a source of many miracles.<sup>1056</sup>



*Figure 59: The head of Fra Melchor de Monserrat, Church of San Miguel - Ambel, Zaragoza*

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<sup>1055</sup> Gerrard, Christopher, *Paisaje y señorío. La casa conventual de Ambel (Zaragoza): arqueología, arquitectura e historia de las Órdenes Militares del Temple y del Hospital* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2003), 382-383.

<sup>1056</sup> *Ibid.*, Translation by Gerrard and Gutierrez, 66.

### ***Conclusion: Living with saints, living like saints***

According to Peter Burke, holiness bred holiness, and ‘the sacred seems to be contagious. At any rate, we find Francis Xavier, Filippo Neri, Pius V and Felice of Cantalice were all associated with Ignatius Loyola; Felice of Cantalice, Camillo de Lellis, Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi and Caterina de’Ricci with Filippo Neri; Francisco Borja, Pedro of Alcantara and John of the Cross with Teresa of Avila; Andrea Avellino and Aloysius Gonzaga with Carlo Borromeo’.<sup>1057</sup>

Throughout this whole work, contagion has been an underlying constant, although this sacred contagion is perhaps the only one that the Hospitallers hoped would catch. What’s more, they were not passive receivers, waiting to be touched by this sacrality, but sought to participate in a wider exercise of defining the very meaning of sanctity. They did so by fielding their own candidates, placing some before others. Suffice it to say that the process was not without its fair share of ambiguities and mixed messages, as both the central authorities of the Church and the regional ones, including the religious orders, were still learning how to approach sanctity.<sup>1058</sup>

This chapter has highlighted two key points. The first is a reconfirmation of the process of interaction or ‘negotiation’ that Burke and others talk about in terms of the imputation of sainthood, even on a micro-historical level.<sup>1059</sup> There is no doubt that for every rule, there were plenty of exceptions, to the point that it becomes difficult to explain sanctity just on the basis of the merits of the individual or merely those qualities that others decreed commendable. The intricacies of the historical exercise of producing *vitae* as an integral part of the sanctifying process challenge readings of the process that are solely based on the contents of the *vitae* themselves. There was a push and pull factor that sometimes challenges even the understanding of the core and peripheries as two opposing monolithic institutions when in-depth case studies like the one presented above clearly demonstrate that universal consensus was rarely the case, much less in the Roman Curia or within a religious order.

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<sup>1057</sup> Burke, *Counter-Reformation Saints*, 140.

<sup>1058</sup> Tutino, *Credulitas (2022)*, 177.

<sup>1059</sup> Burke, *Counter-Reformation Saints*, 141.

The second point draws from the case-studies presented and links to the first, by re-proposing Tutino's statement that early modern Catholicism was a big engine for promoting the importance of intellectual vigour in the process of embracing faith.<sup>1060</sup> These efforts, with all their limitations, 'make a strong case that the world of post-Reformation Catholicism is not a collection of all the things that our enlightened society has managed to leave behind.'<sup>1061</sup> When the scholarly networks that this chapter, are placed alongside the content of the publications themselves, the conclusion one draws is that for the early modern scholar, credulity and erudition were co-dependent.

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<sup>1060</sup> Tutino, *Credulitas* (2022),3.

<sup>1061</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## *Conclusion - Hospitaller Spirituality or the spirituality of the Hospitallers?*

'This is a narrative in which polarities such as "popular" vs "elite" religion; "top-down" vs "bottom-up" confessionalisation; "local" vs "universal" devotional practice and even "centre" vs "periphery" need to be replaced by categories or labels which do fuller justice to what were essentially negotiated processes whose outcomes were not infrequently inconclusive or at least incomplete; processes in which frequently no single person or body was "in charge." Moreover, they were developments which, by their very nature, involved intermediaries, whose own degree of agency ensured that messages were not straightforwardly one-way and that reciprocity within a force field of inequality was the norm rather than the exception'.<sup>1062</sup>

This quote, from a 2018 paper by Simon Ditchfield, neatly summarises some of the preliminary conclusions that can be deduced from this work. The above chapters brought forward several case studies that made use of almost all six methodologies discussed by Karin Vélez in the introduction and took the reader on a journey from Malta to Italy, Spain, France and elsewhere. Some of the Order of St John's spaces, objects and people were thoroughly examined in the hope of identifying a possible element of singularity or a unique spiritual language that set the Hospitallers apart. What emerged is a process that was, as Ditchfield remarked, 'negotiated...whose outcomes were not infrequently inconclusive or at least incomplete'. The towering role of Carlo Borromeo as an early father-figure to the Hospitallers in the process of implementing Tridentine reforms, including a refashioning<sup>1063</sup> of their vocation, is perhaps one of the most important contributions that this study has offered to both the field of Hospitaller Studies and to the wider understanding of Tridentine Italian reformers. The role of Borromeo, primarily involved in the Hospitaller religious experience by members of the Order who were dissatisfied by the direction that their institution was taking,

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<sup>1062</sup> Ditchfield, Simon, 'The "Making" of Roman Catholicism as a "World Religion"', in *Multiple Reformations? The Many Faces and Legacies of the Reformation*, Colloquia historica et theologica 4, Stievermann and Zachman (eds.) (Germany, Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 189.

<sup>1063</sup> Term borrowed from Bireley, Robert, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

directly addressed the matter of which spiritual practices were given prominence, and why. Penance and discipline were both key features of Borromeian spirituality, and according to some knights, they were the spiritual answer to socio-political, moral, and administrative problems that the Order of St John was facing at that time. Chapters 1 and 2 highlighted both the motivation and the capacity of these knights as the driving-force behind the heightening of the religious experience that the newly built Valletta could offer. The hurdles that this reform process encountered along the way highlight how long-term change could not be achieved by a single person alone, not even one of the calibre of Borromeo. If there was some sort of ideal, it was only reached in stages. Returning to Ditchfield's quote, this leaves us wondering whether there was even a "top" and a "bottom" to pit against each other, particularly when one considers the crucial role played by the knights of the Camerata.

Highlighting the role that the Camerata members had in inviting Borromeo and his proteges the Barnabites to actively participate in the Order's spiritual and moral matters further strengthens the conclusion that no single individual was in-charge of these processes, rather it was a case of concentric-circles, or a 'ripple' model, that helps present a more accurate representation of the process. Individuals like Fra Cateliano Casati, Fra Giorgio Nibbia, or later Fra Francesco Buonarroti and Fra Francesco dell'Antella moved between communities and mobilised networks to ensure the success of their initiatives, though none of them was solely responsible for the outcome. Furthermore, their ability to circumvent or force their way through adversity, while on other occasions failing miserably, denotes the difficulty in underscoring that the Magistracy, or even the Papacy, could be blindly labelled as being the "top". Ditchfield's 'reciprocity within inequality' is a perfect description of a situation that was much more fluid than we tend to associate with the Counter-Reformation period.

It is through this negotiation and reciprocity that we can begin to understand whether the Order had any agency in carving a space for itself in the Counter-Reformation spiritual ecosystem. This work has certainly shown that the Order of St John allowed its members a fair degree of flexibility when it came to expressing their spirituality and choosing a language that best suited them. Even though internal disagreements were commonplace, particularly following the active involvement of the Jesuits in Hospitaller doctrinal (and spiritual) formation, there does not seem to be a concerted effort to divert individual members away

from certain spiritual models and closer to others. If anything, the Order as an institution seems to have welcomed the fusion of spiritual traditions in their Convent-city in the century or so after the Council of Trent. While individual Grand Masters might have favoured one religious order over another, based on preferences that generally went beyond the strictly spiritual, it seems that what characterised the spiritual environment in both Malta and the commanderies was diversity and hybridity. This work has strongly argued for Hospitaller spiritual agency based specifically on this element of choice, one that is rarely so pronounced in other religious orders, especially those, like the Jesuits and Carmelites, who had a strong theological tradition. Generally, this choice had its roots in an individual's upbringing, family, or early years as a Hospitaller in Malta.

Perhaps the most indicative of the long-term effect of these spiritual affinities comes with the Fra Jean-Paul Lascaris, an ex-Camerata resident elected to the Magistracy in 1636. Lascaris', spiritual agenda was clear to everyone when only three years prior, he was chosen over the Fra Signorino Gattinara to take the helm of the Order.<sup>1064</sup> On the eve of Lascaris' election, Fabio Chigi was not sure that the French knight's saintly life would be preferred to Gattinara's more able statesmanship.<sup>1065</sup> Chigi seemed satisfied that Lascaris would be able to complete the spiritual reform commenced by his predecessors:

'His mind is holy, his devotion is great, and his life exemplary. Since the first years, he spent with me hours in tender spiritual reasoning, and every four days he sends for me. He thought of being ordained to say mass, had a great wish to do so, and has a saintly envy of priests who every morning celebrate [mass]; if it were not that he is Grand Master, and old, he would still be thinking about it [the priesthood] for the great solace he finds in the Holy Sacrament; he is very devoted towards your eminence [Cardinal Barberini] and would like to work with you to reform this Religion [the Order].'<sup>1066</sup>

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<sup>1064</sup> Borg (1967), 196.

<sup>1065</sup> *Ibid.*, 197; 'benchè in Mons. Castellarcampeggi più la santità della vita e la piacevolezza delle maniere, viene non di meno preferita da altri, in queste congiunture di tempi, la maggior capacità di governo del sig. Gattinara...'

<sup>1066</sup> *Ibid.*, 234; 'La sua mente è santa, la sua devotione è grandissima, e la sua vita esemplare. Fin da primi anni, passa meco l'hore in ragionamenti spirituali tenerissimi, et ogni quattro giorni mi manda a chiamare. Hebbe breve di poter ordinarsi a messa, et ha voglia grande di farlo, et ha una santa invidia a' preti che possono ogni mattina celebrare; e se non fosse G.M., o tanto Vecchio, ancora ci penserebbe, per la consolatione che sente

Lascaris never managed to implement the full spiritual program he envisioned, primarily because his personal attachment to the Jesuits, at times seen as encroaching onto internal Hospitaller matters, did not remain unchallenged. As a consequence of growing tensions between a group of knights and the Jesuits, Lascaris had to banish the Jesuit superior, his confessor and almost all the Jesuits from Malta for the sake of the unity of the Order and his place on the throne.<sup>1067</sup> It was unfortunate that his friend and ally Inquisitor Chigi was relocated as well soon after.<sup>1068</sup> Although the event was not directly related to the *coup* of 1581 against La Cassiere, Chigi commented that 'God preserved his Eminence [the Grand Master] who is hated more than La Cassiere, but Gattinara<sup>1069</sup> did not want to be another Romegas.'<sup>1070</sup> This event was the Hospitaller cause célèbre of the intertwining of spirituality with morality and power-politics, making it harder for the historian to deliver sweeping claims on spiritual processes and who was leading them.

Even if it might seem banal to ask whether the knights were spiritual, going by David Perrin's statement that 'motivation (why people do things) and capacity (the ability to do things or be receptive to them) are also part of spirituality...',<sup>1071</sup> then the possibility of choice and the ensuing disagreements that result from it, is proof enough that the Hospitallers were indeed very spiritual. What constitutes a change in the Order's approach towards its own spirituality in the decades that were studied here is the growing recognition that the Order of St John had multiple vocations. The emergence of the Camerata in the 1570s, with its Borromean spirituality and pious lifestyle, ruffled many feathers. The very nature of the Hospitaller vocation was being questioned and the interpretation of the Order's spiritual charism was at the heart of this disagreement. On the other hand, as the multi-faceted nature of the Hospitaller vocation was more frequently discussed by statutes and discourses, spirituality

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*nel Santissimo Sacramento; è divotissimo di V. Em.a et ambisce di stringersi seco, per riformare questa Religione.*' 15 November 1636.

<sup>1067</sup> Buttigieg, Emanuel, 'Knights, Jesuits, Carnival and the Inquisition in Seventeenth Century Malta', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September 2012), 571-596; Borg (1967), 469-473.

<sup>1068</sup> On Chigi's Maltese Nunciature, see: Borg (1967).

<sup>1069</sup> Fra Signorino Gattinara, Bailiff of St. Eufemia was the favoured candidate to replace Lascaris.

<sup>1070</sup> Borg (1967), 476; '*Dio ha preservato Sua Em.a, che nell'odio maggiore di quello della Casiera, il Gattinara non ha volute essere un Ramagasso*'.

<sup>1071</sup> Perrin, David, *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York and Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 16.



became more of a personal journey rather than a statement that challenged the nature of the institution. A growing notion of the 'self', particularly in matters of the soul, is not unrelated to this change in perception, an idea that was only broached in this work and which certainly deserves more scholarly attention. Even the magistracy, notably during Wignacourt's tenure, became more comfortable with the multivalent definitions of the Hospitaller vocation and by extension, with spiritualities that could be adapted to individual circumstances. Considering this, the promotion of the Order's saints represents much more than a good public exercise; their diverse lives represent the Order's journey of embracing the notion that the Hospitaller vocation combines varying definitions of holiness, a *sui generis* institution through and through. A greater emphasis was consequently placed on the dual charisma '*tuitio fidei, obsequium pauperum*', as a common denominator of all paths of Hospitaller holiness, as well as an ever-growing devotion towards the crucified Christ as an embodiment of the ultimate act of charity (*caritas*). The commanderies offered further points of contact with other spiritualities proposed by other religious institutions, further enhancing this multivalence. This consideration applies roughly to the first century from the conclusion of the Council of Trent, when other variables were also at play, including ones that don't have their roots in religiosity, such as Abela's claim that the Order was far too concerned with its security and that it relied heavily on other religious orders for the care of those souls entrusted to it.

Whereas individual members continued to mix and match spiritualities, one might find sporadic instances of eccentricity or fabrication of spiritual distinctiveness. One could even argue that, from an art-historical perspective, the embellishment project of St John's, launched roughly at the cut-off point of this study, represents one such effort, with the eschatology of blood as the cornerstone of Hospitaller spirituality. The reopening of the Camerata in 1685<sup>1072</sup> and the election of Grand Master Gregorio Carafa, in many ways a second Lascaris, could also be indicative of subsequent attempts at spiritual distinctiveness. A comparative exercise between a first period (ca.1570-1660) and the century that followed (ca.1660-1760) could, along with a comparative analysis of male and female Hospitaller religiosity, yield interesting results.

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<sup>1072</sup> A.O.M., 1697, f.2v; Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith, Masculinity*, 248.

Let us return to the crux of the matter: whether one can truly speak of a distinctly Hospitaller Spirituality in the first century of Tridentinism. The short answer is no. It would be far more accurate to talk of the spiritualities (plural) of the Hospitallers, rather than a spiritual language that was immediately recognisable as being Hospitaller, unique for the Order or sufficiently unlike the prevailing alternatives. Even though in parts of Chapter 3 we discussed the theological contributions of some Hospitaller chaplains, none of the works unearthed so far seems to indicate a novel approach that does not heavily rely on a spiritual model that was already extant. The Order was happy to provide a fertile ground where other religious orders could propagate their spiritual charismas and literature. The members' individual wealth played an ancillary role in this, as a culture of patronage placed the onus on them rather than the institution to set up pious initiatives, create spaces, publish devotional material, or leave financial endowments to further augment their chances of saving their souls. This patronage was a means of expressing spiritual preference, as well as a sense of belonging that often combined their Hospitaller membership with other significant identifiers. Fra Bernardo Vecchietti recounted how in 1628, a Dominican Padre Tedabili was sent from Sicily as the visitor general of the Maltese Dominican convents. Whilst he was here, Grand Master De Paule asked him to deliver a sermon, which Vecchietti enjoyed so much that he hoped the Dominican could also deliver the Lenten sermons. However, the Dominican told his brother that it would have been difficult, given that the Grand Master wanted none other than the Capuchins to deliver the Lenten talks.<sup>1073</sup>

The finest and most unique example is the Zummo brothers' work with the establishment of the female monastic community of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Palermo. Fra Jaime Zummo's *lettere spirituali* are not only a singular instance of Hospitaller spiritual wisdom that later scholars sought to preserve but also the clearest case of an intersection between the way Zummo interpreted his vocation, the nuns' Franciscan rule, and the striking undertone of a Theresian spirituality contained in his letters. Another major overlap is embodied by Fra Ambrogio Mariano di S. Benedetto, the sixteenth-century Hospitaller who chose a life of solitude after having completed the Ignatian spiritual exercises. He would later meet Theresa of Avila and join the Discalced Carmelites while remaining a member of the Order of St John.

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<sup>1073</sup> A.S.F., Fond. Acquisizione e Doni, Vol. 13, f.129r, 15 October 1628.

(Fig.60) Even though he was not the only knight to join another religious order, the ‘hermit knight’ can be considered an exceptional example, as stressed by his biographer, as well; Fra Ambrogio was equally a Hospitaller and a Carmelite. Despite there not being any evidence that Fra Ambrogio remained in the Order’s service in any way, the message that his biographer tried to convey was that one vocation elevated the other, ‘in him shone the double ornaments of merit, and with the Cross of a knight of Malta affixed to his chest; and the star-shaped cross of a Discalced Carmelite imprinted on his heart...’<sup>1074</sup>



Figure 60: St Theresa of Avila giving the Carmelite habit to Fra Ambrogio Mariano di S. Benedetto in the Presence of the Prince and Duchess of Eboli (Pastrana, Museo di S. Teresa).

<sup>1074</sup> ‘...In cui risplende doppio fregio di merito, e colla Croce di Cavaliere Gerosolimitano, affissa al petto; E colla croce Stellata di Carmelitano Scalza, stampata al cuore...’; Di S. Gaetano, *Il Cavaliere Romito*, title page.

Other subtle crossovers include Fra Francesco dell'Antella's altarpiece of Our Lady of the Lilly in San Jacopo, in Florence. The altarpiece combined his affinity to Borromean spirituality and his hopes to have a saintly ancestor, the Servite Mannetto dell'Antella with Fra Francesco dell'Antella's great connection to his compatriot the Florentine Philip Neri. His inclination towards the Servites and their Marian devotion is further evidenced by the titular painting he commissioned for his commandery of St Agata in Mucciano (Tuscany) which shows the Annunciation set against the backdrop of the church of the Santissima Annunziata, the Servites' first hub in Florence. (Fig. 61) Another instance is that of the Bishop of Malta, Gargallo (former Hospitaller vice-chancellor) who had the cult of Montserrat established wherever he went. Montserrat recalled his birthplace Collbatò, but also a place that was meaningful for both Benedictines and Jesuits. Fra Francesco Buonarroti wished to be buried in his family's chapel inside the Franciscan church of Santa Croce, the parish where he grew up. Furthermore, the one Hospitaller saint that he and his brother commissioned Jacopo Vignali to paint in their family home is Blessed Gherardo Mecatti da Villamagna,<sup>1075</sup> who was

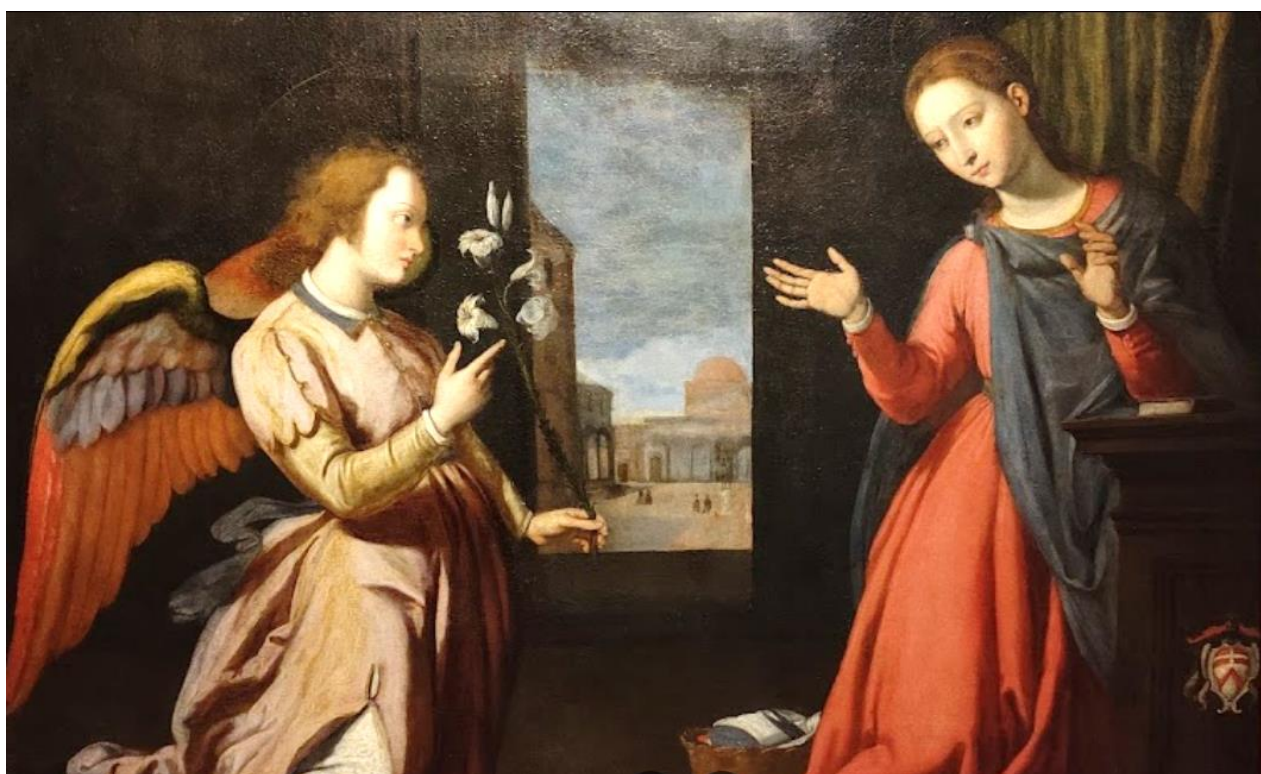


Figure 61: Annunciation (detail) with dell'Antella's crest (bottom-right), Roberto Taccheroni ca.1621, ex-chiesa di S.Agata, Mucciano [Museo d'Arte Sacra 'Beato Angelico' – Vicchio (FI)]

<sup>1075</sup> Cecchi, Alessandro, Lombardi, Elena and Spinelli Riccardo (eds.), *Michelangelo buonarroti il Giovane (1568-1647): Il Culto della Memoria* (Firenze: Edifir, 2021).

both a member of the Order and a Franciscan Tertiary. (*Fig. 62*) Gherardo da Villamagna is typically shown wearing the Hospitaller cross above a Franciscan habit, clearly showing the symbiosis between a Hospitaller vocation with Franciscan spirituality. Lope de Vega's *Romancero Espiritual*, with its sonnets dedicated to both St Ignatius Loyola at Montserrat and St Francis of Assisi, is another example.

This agency that offered an individual member the possibility to choose from a whole spectrum of spiritual traditions resulted in a unique blend of religious expressions that ranged from grand gestures and radical behaviour to silent contemplation and retreat. It is specifically this blend of religious expressions that the Order sought to preserve through its hagiographies, foundations, rituals, and privileges.<sup>1076</sup> The very act of believing has a certain logic to it, even though, as it deals with the study of people, it is generally comprised of 'angles and curves rather than linear developments.'<sup>1077</sup>

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<sup>1076</sup> Tutino, *Credulitas* (2022), 3.

<sup>1077</sup> Buttigieg, *Nobility, Faith, Masculinity*, 186.





*Figure 62: Blessed Gherardo da Villamagna (detail), Jacopo Vignali (1621-22) [Courtesy: Museo Casa Buonarroti - Florence]*

## Appendix 1:

Letter from the Barnabite Padre Paola Maletta to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo upon his arrival in Malta

**Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, Milano – F.62 INF, f.376r-v;  
15/03/1582**

*Supplico a V. S. Ill.ma et Rev.ma si degni perdonarmi della tardanza fatta in soddisfar al debito et riverenza che singolarmente le porto non havendovi scritto prima che hora della gionta mia in quest'Isola di Malta, che fu alli 20 di Genaio del presente anno qual fù co' salvezza merce di Nro Sig.re insieme con il Rev. Padre don Antonio mio compagno con il quale dalla obedientia fui destinato à questa missione per ordine di Sua Santita la qual si degnò accompagnarsi co' un breve di facultà per poter assolvere i casi riservati etiam in Bulla Cene Domini, eccetuati l'heresia et la lesa Maestà del Principe. Sarà dunque V. Illma. Rev. avvisata come poi si troviamo nella casa benedetta di questi Signori Cavalieri ritirati a viver in comune et co' osservanza de lor voti i quali attendono alli suoi essercitii spirituali in casa tra di loro con intervento et assistenza nostra spetialmente di oratione mattina et sera insieme uniti et di altre collationi spirituali, fuori di casa poi oltre al intervento che fanno delli divini offitii et al servizio del Hospitale attendono anchora alla cura de carcerati et de Poveri, vanno accompagnati quelli che sono giustiziati quando che occorre il caso, havendo di qui certi di loro più antiani cura di sustentare et far cusodire una casa di povere zitelle levate et che alla giornata si levano dalle mani delle madri loro pocho honeste prima che le prostituiscano le quali arrivano al numero di trenda due in essa et sono tenute in custodia et clausura da alcune donne atempate di buona vita le quali le amaestrano nelle cose spirituali et altri loro verii esteriori, uno di questi signori e stato il primo che principio questa opera non senza grande contraddittione et impugnatione del Demonio, perseverarono poi anchora detti signori a frequentar i santissimi sacramenti et ritirar de gl'altri Cavaglieri a questo istesso bene, con tutto questo però non manchano di*



*approvarsi et essercitarsi nel essercitio delle arme a lor necessario andando sempre qualche un' di loro sopra le galere quando che vanno in corso et però son forzato per la istanza che mi fanno loro et per la fede grande che hanno in V. S. Illma. et Revendissima raccomandarli alla protettione delle sue orationi et santissima sacrificittio poi che stanno qui come fiori tra spine. Questi anche ci agiutano nella opera della dotrina christiana la quale, grazie del Signore, habbiamo cominciato in questa città Nuova con concorso de molti poi che vi vengono dalli Cavalieri ad insegnarla oltra li nostro ne speriamo del frutto co'l agiuto divino. Io poi per sodisfare a molti che ci hanno ricercato per commodita del Clero et per occupare in cosa utile questi Cavalieri della Religione che hanno tempo assai di otio, cossi inetto come io sono, ho preso a far una lettione in questo principio di Quadragesima sopra li sette salmi penitentiali con'inservi qualche casi di consientia facendola nella Chiesa Maggiore dopo il pranso alle ventidue hore, solamente pero la domenica, mercordi et venerdi perche il sabato per divotione della Madonna ho preso a dichiarare nel istesso luoco la salutatione angelica, piaccia alla divina bontà [f.376r] operare da queste poche fatiche si ricassi qualche frutto permanente. Questo Sig. Gran Maestro nuovo eletto pocho dopo la nostra gionta e persona assai discreta, prudente et matura et mostra grande inchinazione alle cose della pietà et Religione, ogni mattina prima che dia udienza ritirato nella sua capella fa una mezza hora di orazione e ogni giorno oltra la messa privata in chiesa ordinariamente interviene alla messa grande se non é occupato per il consiglio così fa al Vespero et compieta. Mi ha fatto Instantia perche io ne vada una volta la settimana a star un'hora con lui solo, a ragionar delle cose spirituali et mostra grandissimo desiderio di far cosa che sia grata a Sua Santita e mi à pregato a voler raccomandarlo caldamente alle orationi di V.S. Illma et Rev.ssa della quale pubblicamente alla presenza di molti Cavalieri e signori, essendosi anch'io, ha parlato co'grande riverenza et divozione, pero la sua fede merita che tengi memoria di lui accio possa portare il peso che ha sopra le spalle. Alli giorni passati mi fece favore di farmi vedere il grande Thesoro delle rarissime et pretiosissime reliquie quali tiene questa Religione portate già di Gierusalem quando fù forzata a partirsi. Io mi raccordai di lei in quella consolatione spirituale et così non potendo fargline altra parte essendomi stato dato certi anelettì da far toccar quelle sacre Reliquie spetialmente una buona parte del legno della santissima croce di N. Signore, et le tre dita di San Giovanni*

*Battista con li quali mostro il salvatore dicendo Ecce Agnus Dei, quali aneletti si come questi Signori e tutti il popolo per longo spatio di tempo hanno sperimentato a chi li porta con fede, riverenza et divotione servono per rimedio del malcaduco e contra il ranfo: mi risolsi di volerne uno per mandarglielo quale le sara datto in mio nome per mando del nostro molto reverendo padre Generale quella si degni accettarlo per segno della viva memoria che tengo di lei, alla cui oratione et santissime sacrifici come bisognosissimo che io sono humilissimamente raccomandomi, la supplico per la santa Sua Beneditione la quale domando anchora per il Padre mio compagno et per tutte l'anime di questa benedetta casa di Malta alli 18 di Marzo 1582*

Don Paolo Maletta Chierico Regolare

## **Appendix 2:**

**Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 867, f.358-360**

*Istruzioni ad un Religiose ch'era chiamato a Malta da quei Sign.ri Cavalieri*

*Nel negocio di Malta, et de que Cavallieri che si sono dati alla vita spirituale, l'intento che deve haver il Padre spirituale, il quale gli aiuta pare che si debba riferire principalmente al fine al quale debbono i Cavallieri indirizzare ogni suo pensiero et aspiratione. Et come questo fine è comune a tutti i Christiani, et suol essere la regola di tutte le nostre attione, così dovrebbe procurarsi che restassi profondamente impresso nelle menti loro. Al che fare molto converrebbe che ciascuno di loro si disponessi a fare gli exercitii spirituali della nostra Compagnia che si fanno la prima settimana. Percioché oltre la meditatione del fondamento Christiano, che in loro principalmente si suole dare, si aggiunge la purgatione dell'anima per via della confessione generale, la quale fa che la mente nostra vegga più chiaramente la volontà di Dio, et si accenda più a volersi conformar' col voler' di Dio, dal che nasce amore di Sua Maestà Divina verso la persona che più si subordina a lui, et con questa subordinatione si riceve maggiore influxo di gracie, maggiore lume per guidar altri, et maggior fortezza per*

*guidar altri per superare tutte le difficoltà. Et perché tanto importa quanto si sa che i primi fondamenti siano ben posti, però nel preparare l'animo del Cavalliere alla detta preparatione, il padre spirituale potrà servirsi del breve libretto della Guida de peccatori mentre il Cavalliere farà gli esercitii spirituali [f.358v.] dandoglielo a legger, et insieme della Catechesi di frate Antoniacio de Gugutino stampata in Napoli tanto dove si tratta de peccati che si fanno contro i dieci comandamenti quanto dove si tratta dello stato de Soldati, dove sono avvertimenti di importanza per il Padre spirituale, et per colui il quale è sotto la sua cura.*

*Fatto questo, sarebbe spedito che il padre spirituale desse a considerare al Cavalliere non solo il trattato delle cirimonie che s'usano nel creare i Cavalieri di S. Giovanni ma insieme le regole, o constitutioni le quali convieni che si osservino da ciascuno.*

*Et perché questa consideratione non dee farsi in fretta, né scorrendo solo la lettera, però sopra ciascuna regola dovrebbe il Cavalliere andare considerando tre cose, la prima se egli osserva la detta regola, et non osservandola, quali difficoltà, o cause sente perché nol fa; la seconda se l'osserva in tutto, o in parte; la terza se osservando alcuna cosa sente di osservarla, seconda che lo spirito di Dio diedi ai primi fondatori, perché si camminasse da Cavallieri con dette regole.*

*Et perché la memoria è labile, et difficilmente da principio, i Cavallieri potranno darsi dalla meditazione, potrà con alcuni trattati, che vadano scrivendo quelle ragioni, et cose che sentissero nel discorso di dette regole, o, insieme si ragunino per farne ogni giorno conferenza insieme, della quale conferenza, se il Padre spirituale con qualche perito e costumato Cavalliere non penserà, [f.359] di dar' quell'istesso giorno risposta o resolutione, quanto alla difficoltà, che si proponessero, potrà differirla nel seguente giorno, o, settimana, accioché maturamente consigliatosene con Dio Signor Nostro, et con persone più pratiche ed di spirito disponga maggiormente i Cavallieri a credergli, et ad osservare le dette regole.*

*Fatto questo, il quale quasi servirà di catechismo a qualunque Cavalliere converrebbe avere un'ordine, et catalogo di lettione, et libri co i quali secondo lo stato, et officii di quei Cavallieri che fanno residenza nell'Isola, si trattenessero lungi dall'otio, et instrutti nelle cose della fede contra gli errori di Maometto, specialmente et fondasi nella pietà, conseguissero insieme luce*

*delle cose di guerra in quel modo che più pronti fossero alla difesa del nome Christiano, et più efficaci in rimuovere i peccati dell'Isola, et delle Galere con le quali sogliono andar in corso.*

*Et perché il padre spirituale havrà in loro a fare alcuni ragionamenti i quali anco col tempo esti Cavallieri potranno fare fra loro però questo potranno trarsi delle Epistole di S. Bernardo a Templari; Da S. Ambrosio nel libro primo delli officii, al capo 40 et 41 di S. Gregorio al libro primo del Registro dell'Epistole, al capo 72 et settantesimo terzo, Da Francesco Vittoria in Relectione de lure belli, Da S. Tomaso nel trattato de Regimine Principis, Da Paolo Orosio, nel libro 7 al capo 36, Da S. Agostino ad Bonifacium; [f.359v.] et anco assai particolarmente da Sermoni de Bernardino de Bustio, massime nel Sermone 35 della seconda parte, dal 39 della prima parte, del Sermone 27 della 2da parte, del Sermone Ottavo della parte seconda, e del 38 della parte prima.*

*Potrebbero poi distribuirsi oltre l'oratione, et le mortificatione convenienti, et anco la confessione che di sei in sei utilmente potrebbero fare generalmente doppo l'ultima che fatto havessero pur generalmente alcuni officii, et opre di pietà nelle quali si impiegassero: sì che altri havessero particolare cura di visitare le carcere, et altri l'Ospitali, altri di scrivere buone et essortatorie lettere ad altri Cavallieri che sono nell'isola; et questi medesimi potrebbero ancho haver cura delli altri Soldati delle fortezze di S.to Elmo, et di s.to Angelo, di disseminare buoni libri in quelle Navi che ordinariamente passano hor verso Levante, hor verso Occidente, di riscattare Schiavi, o almeno con lettere animargli, o conservar la fede mandando loro alcuni buoni libri, come in Africa, et Tripoli, et altrove.*

[f.360] *Però Vostra Reverentia procuri prima che vada di far due cose, l'una di supplicar Sua Santità et alcune religioni che vogliono efficacemente pregar la Divina Maestà per questo negocio, l'altra di portar molti libri, o mandargli perché non manchino a quei Cavallieri per disseminare. Fra i quali sieno i Catechismi Romani, o dal Concilio di Trento in volgare, perciòché questo servirà a confermare in fede molti, et l'ultimo trattato dell'oratione che al fine può giovare assaissimo. Bonsignore Cacciaguerra della frequentatione del Santissimo Sacramento, il Soldato Christiano et gli esercitii della Vita Christiana del Loarte, Paolo Emilio, delle Vite de i Re di Francia. Quei libri che notai nel Soldato Christiano, Evangelii, Bibbie corrette, opere del Granata, et altri simili.*



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