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**[p.39] The Painting of the Cathedral Dome
at Mdina:**

*A Case Study on Ecclesiastical Artistic Patronage in Malta
in the 19th and early 20th Century*¹

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On Sunday 12th October, 1856, at ten to two in the morning, two consecutive strong earth tremors shook the Maltese Islands.² There was no loss of human life but damage to property was considerable. Several churches, including the then recently erected Anglican Collegiate at Valletta, were badly affected.³ At Mdina the Cathedral of Malta presented serious lesions.

Canon Pietro Xerri, the Cathedral's Procurator, promptly engaged architect Andrea Psaila and master-mason Angelo Gatt to inspect and assess the damage to the building's fabric. In their joint report, dated 15th October, 1856, these two gentlemen identified the various lacerations and made their recommendations.⁴ They recommended ways and means for the repair of most of the damage. However they considered the state of the dome such as to warrant its partial demolition writing: "*Per quelli che sono gravi esistenti nella cupola non possono essere riparati senza sfabricare la [p.40] pensione superiore di detta cupola e rifabricarla di nuovo.*"⁵ Not happy with this proposition, the Canons thought it wise to seek further advice and, on the 17th October, 1856 decided that, in addition to Psaila and Gatt, architects Giuseppe Bonavia and Paolo Attard and master-masons Carmelo Spiteri and Giuseppe Spiteri be also consulted.⁶ The repairs were eventually carried out, without the need of pulling down Lorenzo Gafa's (1630-1704) magnificent cupola,⁷ under the direction and supervision of architect Giuseppe Bonavia (1821-1885).⁸ As a reward Bonavia demanded a

¹ My gratitude and thanks go to the Rev. Can. John Azzopardi, Curator of the Cathedral Museum and Archives at Mdina, without whose support and encouragement this paper would never have been produced. My thanks are also due to the staff at the Cathedral Museum, particularly Mr Tony Terribile. I also have a debt of gratitude towards Mr Mario Buhagiar B.A. (Hons.), M. Phil. (Lond.), the Rev. Fr Serafin Borg O.S.A. and to all those persons who have been of assistance to me in this task.

² For a contemporary account of this earthquake see the contemporary newspaper *L'Ordine* of 17.10.1856.

³ P.P. Castagna, *Lis Storja ta Malta bil Gzejjer Tahha*, 2nd edition, Malta 1988, p. 304.

⁴ C.A.M., M.C. 1854-56, Vol. 30, ff. 816r. & v.

⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 816v.

⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 815.

⁷ Lorenzo Gafa (1630-1704) was Malta's leading Baroque architect. His elegant, well-proportioned churches are classical in inspiration, monumental in appearance and certainly inspired by contemporary Roman architecture. The Cathedral at Mdina, surely one of his masterpieces, was erected at the close of the 17th century to replace the ancient Romanesque Cathedral destroyed by the earthquake of 1697.

⁸ Giuseppe Bonavia (1821-1885) was one of Malta's foremost 19th century architects. He is best remembered for the building of the Chamber of Commerce (La Borsa) at Valletta in 1857. The Parish Church of Stella Maris at Sliema, erected in 1855, was also designed by him.

plot of land in emphyteusis but, instead, got a coffee-pot and the Chapter's many thanks!⁹ (See appendix I)

The painting originally decorating the inside of the dome formed an integral part of the vast pictorial complex that still adorns the rest of the ceiling. The entire vault, including the dome, had been painted *affresco*¹⁰ in 1794 by the Sicilian painter Vincenzo Manno (c. 1750-1821) from cartoons probably prepared or inspired by his more able brother Antonio.¹¹ In her study of Manno's activities in Malta, Citti Siracusano remarks that here Vincenzo reached the highest artistic level of his entire career.¹² Manno's lost [p.41] dome painting represented a *Paradiso* or Glory of Saints in Heaven and was possibly the last section of this cycle to be carried out.

The massive and volumetric appearance of the Cathedral dome, so satisfying aesthetically, belies its history of instability. It has been undermined by water infiltration,¹³ tectonic movements,¹⁴ and on at least two occasions has been hit by lightning.¹⁵ So by the time of the 1856 earthquake it must already have been in a bad shape. Canon Giuseppe Bellanti (1787-1861), in a written statement dated 11th January, 1858¹⁶ remarked “...*giacche il paradiso di Manno da tempo deteriorato e le cagioni del deterioramento sono di natura diversa dal guasto proveniente dalle scosse di terremoti...*” and denigrating Mannos oeuvre he added “*Del paradiso di Manno nel interno della cupola e della sua restaurazione non occorre parlare—Condannava il pubblico al suo apparire lintero lavoro e predannavano i nostri artisti, e chiunque puo vedere da se, ripete e ripetera linfelice elogio.*”¹⁷ Today all that remains of Manno's Glory are two preparatory oil sketches or bozzetti presently hanging in the Cathedral's Sacristy.¹⁸

⁹ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 356.

¹⁰ Fresco painting basically consists of powdered earth colours diluted in water and applied on to a freshly plastered surface. The lime content in the plaster crystallizes upon drying thus permanently binding the absorbed pigment.

¹¹ C. Siracusano *Gli Affreschi della Cattedrale di Mdina e l'opera dei Fratelli Manni a Malta*, in “Quaderni dell'Istituto dell'Arte Medievale e Moderna delle Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Messina,” No. 2, ed. A. Marabotti, 1976.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ For instance in 1846 the Cathedral dome was damaged by an earthquake as was reported in *Il Portafoglio Maltese* of 2/4/1846. Information communicated by Mr M. Buhagiar.

¹⁵ In 1859 Prof. Giuseppe Wettinger, of the University of Malta, was consultant to the Cathedral Chapter as to the installation of a suitable lightning conductor to safeguard the dome.

C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, ff. 372r., 659-663v., 967-968.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 367-368.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 367.

¹⁸ These two *bozzetti* form part of a large series by Manno all concerning the Cathedral ceiling. Some are now on permanent display in the Cathedral Museum. The rest still hang in the Cathedral Sacristy. The two here under consideration are those for the dome and are the largest of the lot. Executed in oils on canvas each picture corresponds to one half of the dome. They are rectangular in format but the figures are composed within a semicircle or lunette. The first is 72 cm x 98 cm and reproduces the Holy Trinity accompanied by the Blessed Virgin, sainted Bishops, Apostles and Angels. The second is 70 cm x 100 cm and depicts founders of Religious Orders, St John the Baptist, female saints and angels. Unfortunately, they are in need of restoration.

The refurbishment of the Cathedral was brought to completion during the month of December, 1857. Following this, on the 12th [p.42] January, 1858, the Chapter met to discuss, alongside other matters, what was to be done about the damaged interior decorations of the now repaired dome.¹⁹ Manno's *Paradiso* lay in utter ruins and the inside of the dome presented a sorry sight. Canon Bellanti²⁰ called it "...una leta lacera e rappezzata," further adding "*E che altro sono oggi le pareti interne della cupola listate da strisce di pietre nuove e fresche unite a strisce di pietre vecchie...*"²¹ Canon Bellanti then, having considered the dome's past vicissitudes, proposed it be simply and plainly decorated "*puro e semplice ornato*," his exact words, so as not to lament in future the loss of a good painting.²²

Canon Francesco Schembri disagreed. He favoured a more ambitious and grandiose scheme—something befitting the dignity of the Cathedral and naturally in keeping with the rest of the ceiling. Subjecting his colleagues to a long panegyric, inclusive of quotations from St. Augustine²³ Canon Schembri spoke of the Cathedral's glorious past and the munificence of their predecessors. Exhorting the Canons to have the dome repainted, he said: "*...non ci sarebbe a mio credere altra via da prendere che o di restaurarla il che non sarà possibile o altrimenti vestirla da capo a fondo con quel modo che meglio all'andamento della volta si confaccia...*"²⁴ Having also lectured the assembly on the various painting techniques, Canon Schembri unequivocally indicated *fresco* as the ideal medium for the purpose.

At the end of the debate the Chapter resolved to appoint a committee of four canons to deal with the matter; they were to confer with the painter Giuseppe Hyzler (1793-1858)²⁵ or, in [p.43] default, some other competent master. The deputies, as the members of the committee were styled, were the following Canons:— the Rev. Emanuele Rossignaud, the Rev. Francesco Schembri, the Rev. Michel'Angelo de Baroni Galea and the Rev. Pietro Xerri.²⁶

The deputies' first report was read out during the Capitular Meeting held on the 16th March, 1858.²⁷ They announced, rather belatedly, Hyzler's demise:²⁸ "*Cesso di più vivere in quelli giorni l'artista Sig. Giuseppe Hyzler nell'anzidetta deliberazione nominato per esaminare se la pittura attualmente nella cupola di questa Chiesa sia ristaurabile si o no.*"²⁹ Having made this announcement they went on to explain the impossibility of finding locally

¹⁹ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 366.

²⁰ Canon Bellanti (1787-1861), according to an inventory of the Cathedral compiled in 1933 by Mgr Antonio Vella, was the author of the large copy of Titian's *Pesaro Altarpiece* formerly in the English Jesuits' College at Mdina and now gracing the Cathedral's sacristy. C.A.M. Inventaria Ecc. Cath., T. 10, Ms. 222, p. 65. Information communicated by Can. J. Azzopardi.

²¹ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, ff. 367-368.

²² *Ibid.*, ff. 367-368.

²³ *Ibid.*, ff. 371-372.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 371.

²⁵ The painter Giuseppe Hyzler was held in very high esteem by his Maltese contemporaries. His ascendancy was such that he dominated local artistic tastes and fashion, particularly in the realm of sacred art.

²⁶ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 364v.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 402r. & v.

²⁸ Giuseppe Hyzler died during the night between the 19th and 20th January, 1858. Two lengthy obituaries were published in the newspaper *L'Ordine* on the 22nd and 29th January respectively.

²⁹ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 402.

another qualified person, stating that artists in Malta were unfamiliar with the art of *fresco* painting.³⁰ So the Cathedral Chapter opted to appoint a foreign artist.³¹

Unexpectedly, when the deputies were about to contact an artist from Rome, just before the Chapter's August convocation,³² Giovanni Gallucci (b. 1815),³³ an Italian painter then residing in Malta, offered his services: "*mentre eravamo già sul punto di rivolgerci ad un artista in Roma... fummo in pensatamente richiesti da un certo signor Gallucci romano per affidare a lui la commissione di simile lavoro.*"³⁴ This offer was considered providential as it avoided the trouble and expense of bringing over to Malta an artist from abroad.³⁵ The deputies reassured the Chapter of Gallucci's competence: "... *non estraneo all'arte della pittura storica, esercente ancora la professione di ritrattista, sin da più anni trovati in [p.44] quest'isola e gode di una fama piuttosto lusinghiera.*"³⁶ So Gallucci was invited to inspect the state of the decorations on the inside of the dome. Giving his verdict that it was beyond restoration, Gallucci suggested it be repainted afresh either to Manno's original scheme or to a totally new composition of his own invention. To prove his skill at *fresco* painting he agreed to execute several samples on stone slabs to be tested by a referee.³⁷ Considering these propositions reasonable, the deputies recommended him to the Chapter.³⁸ As Gallucci's examiner, the Chapter resolved to elect no less a personality than Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871), head of the *Accademia di San Luca* and, possibly, the most influential painter in Rome at the time.³⁹

Giovanni Gallucci was quick in preparing his samples. However, they were never destined to leave Malta. A note by Canons Rossignaud and Galea, dated 26th January, 1859 reveal that not all was well.⁴⁰ These two reverend gentlemen complained to the Chapter about obstacles hindering the dispatching of the aforementioned samples. They added that Canon Schembri, who was given the task of communicating with Minardi, had showed them a letter which implied that the issue had already been discussed with the Roman Academician and that the latter had expressed the opinion that none who had not been to Rome could possibly be an expert at *fresco* painting.⁴¹ All this irritated Canon Rossignaud to the point of inducing his resignation from the dome [p.45] committee on the 2nd February 1859 and he was replaced by Canon Paolino Ellul.⁴²

³⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 402v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 400.

³² *Ibid.*, f. 527.

³³ On Gallucci see biographical note, *infra*.

³⁴ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 537r.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 517v.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 537r.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 537v.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 358.

³⁹ Tommaso Minardi was the leading exponent of the so called *Puristi* who advocated a return to Raphael's modes and style by cleansing and purifying sacred art from all sorts of Baroque trends considered as degenerate and profane. Typical of his Raphaelesque style is his charming MADONNA WITH THE CHILD JESUS AND INFANT ST JOHN, dated 1862, at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta. For many years Minardi held the chair of Drawing and Painting at the famed *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome and was mentor to several Maltese artists; hence he was well-known and esteemed in Malta.

C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 520v.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 642r. & v.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, f. 642v.

⁴² *Ibid.*, f. 653.

The Capitular Congregation of the 26th January, 1859 urged the deputies to seek an artist capable of painting the dome in oils.⁴³ This decision, to have the dome painted in oils instead of *fresco*, was to say the least unexpected; it completely disregarded Gallucci and was counter to the Chapter's original dispositions to have the dome frescoed. The deputies, however, procrastinated. It was learnt that an expert from the *Accademia di San Luca* was due to survey Mattia Preti's painting on the vault of the Conventual Church of St. John in Valletta⁴⁴ and they therefore thought of availing themselves of this expertise before making any further commitments. The expert turned out to be Nicola Consoni (1814-1884),⁴⁵ a pupil of Minardi, who on the 25th August, 1859⁴⁶ was conducted to see the Cathedral dome at Mdina. Recommending *fresco* for the project Consoni ascertained he saw no problem as to the adherence of the necessary *intonaco* or plaster.⁴⁷ On learning that probably Manno's bozzetti would be followed, he remarked that then anybody could carry out the commission since the proportions were still extant on the dome and there were no problems or difficulties of invention.⁴⁸

At this stage the local artistic community must have been well aware of the intended project and started showing interest. Mgr. Gaetano Pace Forno,⁴⁹ the Bishop of Malta, received from the painters Paolo Cuschieri (b. 1820), Giuseppe Bonnici (1834-1900), [p.46] Antonio Falzon (1815-1865) and naturally Giovanni Gallucci (b.1815) petitions soliciting the commissions.⁵⁰ The Bishop forwarded these petitions to the Chapter for consideration on the 5th September, 1859.⁵¹

Paolo Cuschieri's request carries the date 12th March, 1859⁵² (See appendix II). It is of particular importance and relevance to the present study for it throws light on the role played by some of the personalities, mentioned here, in relation to our subject. Cuschieri, eager in acquiring this commission, went to great length to win over the favours of the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, f. 868.

⁴⁴ Consoni's report on Mattia Preti's vault paintings at St John's was published in the newspaper *L'Ordine* of the 6/4/1860.

⁴⁵ Born at Rieti in Italy and a pupil of Minardi and Sanguinetti, Nicola Consoni was mainly active in Rome where he decorated the Vatican Library and designed the mosaics on the facade of the Basilica of S. Paolo Fuori le Mura.

⁴⁶ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 868r.

⁴⁷ Although in Malta we do have examples of fresco paintings it has been generally held to be incompatible with local stone and climate. The main worry was that the *intonaco* or plaster does not adhere properly onto Malta's limestone. However, this is a debatable point. On this subject of interest is the Commissioners' Report on the painting of St John's vault by Mattia Preti.

N.L.M., AOM 260, f. 107.

⁴⁸ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 868r. & v.

⁴⁹ Mgr Gaetano Pace Forno was born at Victoria, Gozo, on the 5th September, 1807. In 1824 he joined the Order of St Augustine and was ordained priest in 1832. He was consecrated Bishop of Malta and Gozo in 1857. Bishop Pace Forno died at Castellamare di Stabia on the 22nd July, 1874 while travelling to Rome. His mortal remains were brought to Malta and interred in the Cathedral at Mdina the following year. In the Sacristy of the Augustinian Church of his native Victoria, there hangs his portrait painted by Giovanni Gallucci in 1858. For a detailed Biography of this prelate see S. Borg, *Reliġjużi Agostinjani Għawdxin*, mimeographed, Gozo 1983, pp. 47-52.

⁵⁰ See appendices.

⁵¹ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, ff. 866 & 867.

⁵² *Ibid.*, ff. 875-876.

Ecclesiastical authorities. His petition consists of three documents:— The first is a letter of recommendation by Tommaso Minardi, on 3rd March, 1847⁵³ (See appendix III) certainly issued at Cuschieri's termination of his studies in Rome. The second document is directly relevant to this story. It is a personal letter addressed by Minardi to his pupil Cuschieri and dated 3rd September, 1858⁵⁴ (See appendix IV). The third document is the actual petition addressed to the Bishop.

Paolo Cuschieri commenced his petition by reminding the Bishop that: “...nel Capitolo tenuto nello scorso Febbraio fu deciso che la dipintura della Cupola della Cattedrale dev'esser eseguita all'olio e da pennello nazionale...” and consequently asked to be given preference.⁵⁵ On asking the Bishop to take cognizance of Minardi's letter, he assured the prelate that in seeking this commission he was being inspired by noble ideals and not by the prospects of material gain. His mentor's letter encouraged and urged him in his quest. Disclosing Cuschieri's ignorance of fresco [p.47] painting, Minardi offered his disciple to teach him the technique and assist him in the necessary preparatory work: “...affidino a voi l'opera, di cui mi parlate, e venitesene a Roma, e in pochi mesi voi diverrete un abile frescante: ve ne do la mia parola. Così in pari tempo preparerete la composizione i cartoni gli studi, insomma tutto ciò che è indispensabile, e da cui dipende il buon esito dell'opera.”⁵⁶ The reason why Minardi favoured Cuschieri to the detriment of Gallucci is that he was certainly being influenced from Malta. In fact, in the second paragraph of his letter we are given to understand this when he clearly shows that Cuschieri had an important and influential ally in the person of Canon Schembri: “Direte a nome mio all'ill. mo. Sig. Canonico Schembri, che assai ragionevolmente, anzi ottimamente egli si adopera col prediligere voi a una impresa, che aspetta ad artefice Maltese e non a niun estero.”⁵⁷ This last quotation manifests Canon Schembri's desire to have the dome of Malta's Cathedral decorated by a Maltese artist, probably considering Paolo Cuschieri as the most suitable candidate for the job. However, the combined efforts of Minardi and Canon Schembri proved of no avail to Cuschieri.

Giuseppe Bonnici's petition, dated 26th February, 1859⁵⁸ (See appendix V), is unassuming, short and to the point. Declaring himself a pupil of Minardi, he offered to carry out the preliminary preparations either in Malta or, if need be, in Rome under the direct supervision of Minardi. Finally, he offered to execute the work in either oils or fresco.

The third petition was Antonio Falzon's and bears the date of 11th April, 1859.⁵⁹ (See appendix VI). This document is primarily important for the wealth of biographical information it contains on its author. He recounts his various artistic exploits and, challenging his rivals to a competition, he wrote: “...occorrendo e pronto alle prove autentiche del su narrato, non che di qualunque saggio di sua invenzione, o copia per assoggettarlo alla critica di qualunque Artista dell'Italia, solo o insieme con quegli degli altri [p.48] concorrenti.”⁶⁰ To satisfy the Chapter's wish that the new dome decorations be in keeping with the existing paintings on the rest of the ceiling, he proposed to use the medium of oils in such a manner as to resemble fresco: “...e nell'istesso tono del colorito, che non differiscono nulla di sotto in

⁵³ *Ibid.*, f. 878.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 877r. & v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 875r.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 877v.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 877r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 879r. & v.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 880r. & v.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 880v.

affresco.”⁶¹ Concluding, Falzon assured the Bishop that he was seeking this commission solely “...per lasciar la sua memoria ai posteri...”,⁶² and therefore would not ask more money than the sum initially stipulated.⁶³

In his *ricorso* of the 2nd February, 1859 Giovanni Gallucci gave a detailed account of his dealings with the Cathedral Canons⁶⁴ (See appendix VII). He complained of the treatment meted to him and expressed dismay at the unexpected change to paint the dome in oils instead of fresco: “... non senza sua sorpresa e venuto a sapere di aver il sullodato Capitolo, dimentico delle trattative col Ricorrente seguite, con deliberazione del 26 dell’or scorso mese deliberato che la pittura si eseguisse non piu a fresco ma in olio... una tale notizie sia riuscita dolente al Ricorrente, vedendosi leso nel decoro, nel dritto e nell’interesse.”⁶⁵ Though hurt, he nonetheless accepted the challenge posed by his competitors and suggested that, as a test-piece, they would be set the reproduction to scale of part of Manno’s bozzetto. Reiterating not to forgo whatever rights he may have had acquired, Gallucci ends by requesting the Bishop to grant him the commission and to give dispositions accordingly.

Giovanni Gallucci succeeded in getting the assignment. By a minute dated 7th September, 1859 Mgr. Pace Forno instructed the Cathedral Canons to award the contract to Gallucci and authorised the deputies to negotiate the terms of contract with the artist.⁶⁶ He also established that the dome be frescoed as per Manno’s models. During the following month of October all contract details were finalised.⁶⁷ The terms agreed to by the parties, as was first [p.49] illustrated to the Chapter on the 24th September, 1859⁶⁸ and recapitulated by Canon Pietro Xerri, were as follows: The Cathedral Chapter bound itself to pay for the erection of the necessary scaffolding and the cost of materials for the *intonaco* i.e. plaster; all other expenses were to be incurred by the artist who was to receive 3,000 Maltese scudi as remuneration in monthly instalments of 50 scudi starting from the time of the signing of the contract. Gallucci bound himself to finish the job in the span of one year.⁶⁹

The sole dissenting voice remaining in the Chapter was that of Canon Schembri who persisted and insisted in his opposition to Gallucci.⁷⁰ Admitting that he had at first advocated *fresco* he now, nonetheless, considered it unsuitable, dangerous and costly also pointing out that “oils” was cheaper: “...percio dopo fatto queste ulteriori riflessioni questa maniera da me tanto sostenuta desso la trovo molto pericolosa ... invece di addobare la maniera chiamata fresco che sarebbe dispendiosissima e pericolosissima appigliassene a quella ad oglio the sarebbe di modica spesa...”⁷¹ Canon Schembri considered the total cost of the project excessive specifying that Gallucci would only be partially restoring the dome’s paintings: “...il signor Gallucci,” he said, “...si limitava al solo restauro di una porzione di essa cupola...”⁷²

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, f. 880v.

⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 880v.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 880v.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 869-872v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 872.

⁶⁶ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 888.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 951v.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 918v.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 915v.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 924-925v.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, f. 925v.

⁷² *Ibid.*, f. 924v.

Canon Schembri's last entreaty proved futile. On the 8th October, 1859 the Bishop endorsed the agreement⁷³ and on the 13th of the same month the contract was drawn by Notary Pietro Brincat, in the Cathedral Sacristy, and signed by Canon Pietro Xerri and Canon Paolo Ellul, acting for the Chapter, and the Painter Giovanni Gallucci.⁷⁴ Gallucci fulfilled his contractual obligations in a relatively short time and on the 16th May, 1860 he signed a receipt, endorsed by Notary Brincat, in acknowledgement of the 3,000 scudi received from the Cathedral [p.50] Chapter, through Canon Francesco Saverio Vassallo, in payment for decorating the Cathedral dome.⁷⁵

Notwithstanding the importance of the commission the work received, to say the least, a lukewarm reception on its completion. The local press ignored the painting and did not express itself over the matter. This time l'Ordine, usually so loquacious and prompt in praising, not always justified, and announcing the production and inauguration of new works of art in even the humblest of Malta's churches, kept absolute silence in this case. Only in 1861⁷⁶ do we read, in a general article on the Cathedral at Mdina, in l'Ordine a cursory mention of Gallucci's dome painting. However, this indifference did not signify the end of Gallucci's artistic activities in the Maltese Islands for he continued, for many years after, to enjoy local patronage. As late as 1882 he was working in the Parish Church of Xewkija in Gozo, painting the four Evangelists on its dome and two lunettes direct on stone in the nave. These works were lost in 1972 following the demolition of Xewkija's old Parish Church.⁷⁷

Gallucci's paintings inside the Cathedral dome of Mdina are no longer extant. The only remaining visual record is an old photograph kept at the Cathedral Museum. A comparative study of this photograph and Manno's original "bozzetti" reveal how heavily Gallucci relied on the latter. Almost certainly he incorporated the remnants of Manno's fresco and produced what was essentially a reconstruction of the older master's composition. This partially justifies Canon Schembri's last altercation.⁷⁸ Anyhow, whatever the merits or demerits of this work by Gallucci, we must admit that we are now in no position to judge it as we cannot possibly engage into proper critical analysis by simply relying on an old photograph.

To assess Gallucci as an artist we must therefore look elsewhere. Until vandalised and completely obliterated, notwithstanding their perfect state of conservation, in 1985 to make room for a new set of paintings of the same subject, the Parish [p.51] church of Għarb in Gozo had on the pendentives of its dome a series of four Evangelists executed by Giovanni Gallucci round 1859. Painted in oils direct on stone, they represented the saints meditating or writing accompanied by their respective attributes. Competently executed and possessing strong chromatic qualities, they were monumental and impressive to behold and were an excellent parameter of Gallucci's art at the time he was working in Mdina. Hence I cannot but regret the senseless destruction of important specimens of 19th century art in Malta, presumably out of ignorance and parochial pique.⁷⁹ Similar to the Għarb Evangelists are the ones in the Parish Church of Sannat, also in Gozo. Painted on canvas they are, however, smaller in format and on a lower artistic key.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, f. 944.

⁷⁴ N.A.V., Acts of Notary Pietro Brincat, Vol. 33/617, ff. 293-297.

⁷⁵ C.A.M., DEP. 70, ff. 189-190v.

⁷⁶ *L'Ordine* 30/8/1861.

⁷⁷ S. Borg, *Ix-Xewkija fi Ġrajjet il-Kappillani u l-Arċiprieti tagħha*, Gozo 1978, p. 38.

⁷⁸ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 924.

⁷⁹ This sad episode happened in 1985. It was during the month of January of that year that I had the opportunity to see Gallucci's Għarb Evangelists still intact but by then the decision to destroy them had already been taken and preparations were under way.

Gallucci's work at Mdina, as we have seen, were not destined to survive for very long. According to Raphael Bonnici Calì the painter Giuseppe Calì (1849-1930), whom he says had assisted Gallucci in 1860, was asked in 1885 to restore the already deteriorating dome paintings.⁸⁰ However, the *coup de grace* came in 1926 when the dome's structure again showed signs of decay. Alarmed, the Cathedral Chapter, on the 16th September, 1926 authorised the erection of scaffolding inside the Cathedral to enable an architect to go up and test the dome's interior structure.⁸¹

Prof. Architect R.V. Galea P.A.A. thoroughly reviewed the state of the dome and, in his report dated 19th April, 1927⁸² concluded that it had to be demolished and rebuilt more or less along the same aesthetic lines.⁸³ Gafa's dome was once more in danger! The Chapter thought otherwise and deliberated on the 12th May, 1927 to hear the opinions of architects Emanuel Borg and Gustavo Soler.⁸⁴ Borg and Soler in a joint statement, dated [p.52] 12th June, 1927,⁸⁵ contradicted Prof. Galea. They recommended the repairing of the dome which, unfortunately, entailed the destruction of the paintings adorning its interior: "... *vi occorrebbe di rimuovere dalla parte esterna la terrazza della Calotta e di sostituirla con altre nuove, come pure di distruggere tutte le pitture con cui e presentemente decorata internamente la stessa Calotta.*"⁸⁶ Naturally Prof. Galea protested and a heated controversy ensued which we need not recount. It is enough for us to know that the Chapter, on the 27th May, 1927, voted in favour of the project as proposed by architects Borg and Soler.⁸⁷ The Cathedral dome was then repaired at the cost of £282⁸⁸ and the loss of Gallucci's murals.

The complete obliteration of Gallucci's frescoes on the cupola once more posed the problem of a suitable decoration for the Cathedral dome. The question was aired by the Cathedral Chapter on the 5th July, 1928 but the only decision taken was to designate Canons Vella, Tabone and Bugeja to further explore the matter.⁸⁹ The Chapter had not yet made up its mind what to do when Virginio Monti (1860-1940), an Italian painter who had already worked in Malta,⁹⁰ sent a letter dated Rome 13th April, 1931,⁹¹ (See appendix VIII) soliciting the commission. The Chapter, however, replied by simply asking Monti for an estimate and whether he would carry out the work personally using the *fresco* technique.⁹²

By the 6th May, 1932 all relevant information on a number of artists capable of carrying out the intended dome paintings had been collected and the subject was entered for discussion in the agenda of an extraordinary Capitular Meeting.⁹³

At the Capitular convocation, held on the following 19th May, [p.53] the first to speak was Canon Bugeja who said that Chev. Vincenzo Bonello⁹⁴ favoured fresco to oil technique

⁸⁰ R. Bonnici Calì, *Catalogue G. Calì Centenary Exhibition*, Malta 1946, pp. 17-18.

⁸¹ C.A.M., M.C. 1926, Vol. 71, ff. 431v-432r.

⁸² *Ibid.*, ff. 239-251v.

⁸³ C.A.M., M.C. 1927, Vol. 72, ff. 250-251 para. 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 264.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 354-357.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 356.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 437-439.

⁸⁸ C.A.M., M.C. 1928, Vol. 73, ff. 112v. & 120.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 293r. & v.

⁹⁰ Monti is still well remembered in Malta for having painted the vault of the Matrice at Birkirkara and the Parish Church of Xaghra in Gozo.

⁹¹ C.A.M., M.C. 1931, Vol. 76, f. 204.

⁹² C.A.M., M.C. 1932, Vol. 77, f. 219.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, f. 129.

and that earthquakes affected both media in exactly the same manner. On the basis of this advice the Chapter deliberated in favour of fresco adding that the new painting be in harmony with that of Manno whilst insisting on modesty: “*Il Capitolo delibera che la pittura sia eseguita a fresco... e che lo stile debba essere in armonia collo stile della chiesa stessa colla raccomandazione che tanto a modestie si usi catigatezza.*”⁹⁵ Following this Canon A. Vella brought up the matter as to who was to be awarded this commission. He presented, for examination by the Chapter, photographs of works and original sketches by Virginio Monti, Baccio Bocci, Villani, Bevilacqua, Eliodoro Coccoli⁹⁶ and Achille Casanova. The choice fell on the Bolognese painter Casanova.⁹⁷ Immediately, instructions were issued to the commission responsible for the project to open negotiations with the artist. The subject was to remain that of a Glory of Saints in Heaven with particular emphasis on St. Paul.⁹⁸ Thus commenced a long, recalcitrant, often exasperating haggle that lasted several years which finally lead to nowhere. The main hurdle was the price demanded by Casanova and the amount which the Chapter was prepared to pay.

[p.54] On the 9th January, 1933, Canon Vella read to his colleagues a letter from Casanova by which the latter was asking for the sum of £4,100 to carry out the commission,⁹⁹ a sum which the Chapter considered beyond its means.¹⁰⁰ There followed further exchanges of correspondence until, at one stage, Casanova was due to come to Malta and the Chapter thought of discussing the matter with him personally: “*Il Capitolo si riserva di trattare personalmente col. Sig. Casanova, quando come promette, sarà venuto a Malta nel prossimo Aprile.*”¹⁰¹ However, Casanova apparently did not turn up and so the haggling continued by correspondence. On the 20th April, 1933 Mgr. Vella was instructed to tell the painter to produce a sketch and to promise him payment for it in the eventuality the commission was not awarded to him.¹⁰² The sketches were submitted for approval on the following 11th September.¹⁰³ The Chapter wrote back on the 28th October, 1933¹⁰⁴ making several remarks

⁹⁴ Chev. Vincenzo Bonello (1891-1969) was at the time Curator of Fine Arts at the Museums Dept. of Malta.

⁹⁵ C.A.M., M.C. 1932, Vol. 77, f. 145v.

⁹⁶ Eliodoro Coccoli (1880-1974) was then decorating the Parish Church of St Paul at Rabat—a task which he initiated in 1932 and completed in 1952. From 1938 to 1949 Coccoli also worked in the Church of St Gregory the Great at Sliema. In both these instances work, for obvious reasons, had to be interrupted during the years of World War II. See B. Passamani, *Eliodoro Coccoli 1880-1974, Catalogo della Mostra*, Grafo Edizioni, Brescia 1983, pp. 67-73. Very revealing of the activities by Italian artists in Malta is a letter sent to Coccoli by the Rev. Fr Antonio Buhagiar, Parish Priest of Rabat, dated 18th January 1933. The subject of the correspondence is naturally the paintings for the Rabat Church but there is a passage in which Fr Buhagiar writes: “... C’è Prof. Palmieri del Vaticano che ha intrapreso lavoro al Siggiewi, c’è il Prof. Villani a Birchircara, c’è Casanova di Padova (sic) che ha un lavoro in una piccola chiesa di Marsascala e che sta in corrispondenza con la Cattedrale; c’è Baccio Bacci che è in corrispondenza con l’arciprete della Musta; poi ci sono Monti per la pittura e decorazione quelli di C. Curmi...” This interesting letter, in the archives of the Collegiate of St Paul at Rabat, was brought to my attention by the Rev. Can. John Azzopardi.

⁹⁷ C.A.M., M.C. 1932, Vol. 77, f. 146v.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 146v. & 196v.

⁹⁹ C.A.M., M.C. 1926-37, Vol. 6, f. 146v.

¹⁰⁰ C.A.M., M.C. 1933, Vol. 78, f. 1v.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, f. 118.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, f. 175v.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, f. 386

and observations as to the iconography and placing of the various saints and pointing out that all figures should be chaste: “*Che tutti i personaggi compaiano, anche quelli degli angeli siano talmente vestiti che nulla vi sia che possa offendere la modestia.*”¹⁰⁵ Having pointed out the above the artist was asked to produce two new sketches.

The new drawings were viewed by the Chapter on the 14th May, 1934 but retorted that Manno’s bozzetto should, as far as it was possible, be followed.¹⁰⁶ Anyhow, in September Casanova sent in a sketch in pencil on paper pasted on to a plaster model of the dome to which the chapter gave its approval and expressed the desire that work be commenced the coming January.¹⁰⁷ However, the money question had as yet to be resolved. More haggling followed until finally Casanova lowered his price to £2,600 but the Chapter, on the 11th March, 1935 decided to suspend the deal.¹⁰⁸ [p.55] Mgr. Apap Bologna, on the 3rd October, 1935, proposed the painting be carried out in oils on canvas by the artist at home and afterwards transported to the dome either by the artist in person or by an assistant, thus considerably reducing costs.¹⁰⁹ For the new project Casanova asked £2,000 to be paid in four instalments.¹¹⁰

For a period of nearly two years the entire undertaking remained in abeyance whilst the Chapter was busy drawing a new set of statutes for itself. At long last on the 20th December, 1937 it again wrote to Casanova demanding a considerable lowering of his price “*una forte riduzione*” for the painting’s execution in oils.¹¹¹ The artist was flabbergasted and wrote back a polite but angry letter deprecating his position and, instead of offering to lower his remuneration, asked for a 30% increase¹¹² (See appendix IX). To this the Chapter answered that it wished to stop all dealings.¹¹³ Achille Casanova made one last attempt to save this commission and wrote back a letter, dated Bologna 23rd April, 1938, to the Rev. Filippo Muscat re-explaining his position and putting his price at £2,250 and demanded, in case he was not given the contract, to be compensated for his sketches.¹¹⁴ The entire affair was finally brought to an end by a note from Rev. Filippo Muscat, secretary to the Cathedral Chapter, to Casanova asking him to send the relative bill for his bozzetto.¹¹⁵

In 1938 diplomatic relations between Britain and Italy were on the verge of rupture. Eventually Italy declared war on England and in doing so opened hostilities with Malta which at the time formed part of the British Empire. The advent of the Second World War, had an accord been reached, would certainly have hindered Casanova from executing his projected decoration of the Cathedral dome. As things turned up Mdina’s magnificent cupola was at long last painted, through the initiative of the late Archbishop of Malta [p.56] Mgr. Michael Gonzi, by another Italian painter Mario Caffaro-Rore (b. 1910) who carried it out in oils on canvas pasted on to the wall.¹¹⁶ The theme, as was to be expected, was a Glory of Saints in Heaven and was brought to completion in 1955.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 462r. & v.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 462v.

¹⁰⁶ C.A.M., M.C. 1934, Vol. 79, ff. 194r. & v.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 480-487.

¹⁰⁸ C.A.M., M.C. 1935, Vol. 80, f. 81.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 434.

¹¹⁰ C.A.M., IND. CRO. 1926-37, Vol. 6, f. 204.

¹¹¹ C.A.M., M.C. 1937, Vol. 82, unpaginated.

¹¹² C.A.M., M.C. 1938, Vol. 83, unpaginated.

¹¹³ C.A.M., IND. CRO. 1938-44, Vol. 7, f. 4r. & v.

¹¹⁴ C.A.M., M.C. 1938, Vol. 83, unpaginated.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ M. Caffaro-Rore *Pittore Scultore*, Italia 1984, pp. 21-23.

To conclude a few considerations: undoubtedly, the College of Canons, which forms the Cathedral Chapter, has at all times striven, in their responsibility for the running of the Cathedral, to embellish it in the most befitting and appropriate manner. However, the fact that all decisions had to be taken collectively caused undue delays and a certain amount of uncertainty on the part of its members individually and, as in the case of Gallucci and more recently Caffaro-Rore, the Bishop had to spur them on or take the initiative to arrive to a conclusion. Finally there is the case of Canon Francesco Schembri: his enthusiasm and assiduous support of Paolo Cuschieri was, perhaps, at times taken a bit too far. But who can blame him? He was only backing a Maltese artist against the competition of a foreigner. In retrospect, when looking at the Cathedral of Mdina and its many artistic treasures, our impression is that the Cathedral Chapter has after all contributed in no small way towards Malta's artistic heritage. It is to the credit of their prudence and caution that today we can still enjoy what is surely one of Malta's finest domes. And this is no vain praise.

[p.57] GIOVANNI GALLUCCI—A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Giovanni Gallucci was born on the 1st December, 1815 at Ancona in Italy and is said to have been a pupil of the painter Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871).¹ Vincenzo Caruana Gatto, writing in 1906, mentions that his brother was the Bishop of Loreto² and that Giovanni was probably the author of a series of portraits of Bishops of that See.³ Gallucci was a talented engraver, draughtsman and a painter specialised in religious art.⁴ In Italy there are works by him at Imola in the church of the Good Shepherd, in the Cathedral of Recanati and in the Collegiate Church of Castel Nuovo.

According to Thieme-Becker, Gallucci first migrated to Tripoli from whence he later travelled to Malta.⁵ Almost certainly he must have been induced to the island by the possibility of work but the date of his arrival in Malta is as yet not known. Certainly by 1858, that is by the time when the Cathedral Chapter of Mdina started deliberations as to the interior decoration of the Cathedral dome, he must already have been residing in Malta for a number of years and had acquired a good reputation as an artist.⁶ I presume that Gallucci might have first arrived in Malta towards the end of the 1840s or the beginning of the 1850s. Two advertisements in the local newspaper *L'Ordine* in 1858 inform us that Gallucci had his studio at No. 18 Strada Zecca, Valletta and that he was a dealer in antique paintings.⁷ So far the earliest reference we have on Gallucci's activities in Malta dates to 1853 when he executed the portrait of the Reverend Michelangelo R. Calleja for the sacristy of the Parish Church of Żebbuġ, Malta. In 1857, he painted a Madonna for the street decorations put up in honour of

¹ Benezit, E., *Dictionnaire des Peintres Sculpteurs Dessinateurs et Graveurs*, Vol. IV, Librairie Grund, 1966, p. 143.

² Caruana Gatto, V., *Malta Artistica illustrata*, Malta 1906, pp. 90-91.

³ Information communicated by the *Centro per i Beni Culturali della Regione Marche* by letter dated 1st August, 1985.

⁴ *Dizionario Enciclopedico Bolaffi dei Pittori e degli Incisori Italiani*, Vol. V, Torino 1974, p. 243.

⁵ Thieme-Becker, *Kunstlerlex*, Vol. XIII, Leipzig 1920, p. 131.

⁶ C.A.M., M.C. 1857-59, Vol. 31, fol. 537v.

⁷ *L'Ordine*, 22/1/1858, 29/1/1858.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel [p.58] in Valletta.⁸ Apart from the above-mentioned activities, Gallucci was also engaged in teaching.⁹

The zenith of Gallucci's career in Malta came in 1859 when, notwithstanding fierce competition from local artists, he was commissioned to paint the interior of the Cathedral dome at Mdina.¹⁰ As late as 1882 Gallucci was still active in the Maltese islands for in that year he executed, directly on stone, two lunettes and four Evangelists on the dome of the old Parish Church of Xewkija in Gozo.¹¹ What happened after this last commission is simply not known including the place and date of his demise.

[p.59] APPENDIX I

Ill.mo Signore

*Tengo di dire a V. Signoria Ill.ma con la presente a nome del Rev.mo Capitolo della Chiesa Cattedrale, che esso si dispiace di non poter soddisfare le brane di V. Sig.ria col darle ad enfiteusi il bramato sito: pur non di meno però esso m'incarica d'inviarle la Cafettiera che le presenterà il lator della presente, qual contrassegno della sua gratitudine alla soprintendenza di V. Sig.ria ai lavori di accomodamento della su indicata Chiesa, con tanto successo terminati
Ho l'onore di essere*

*di V. Sig. ria Ill.ma
Sig. Architetto G. Bonavia
Notabile il 24 Dicembre, 1857.*

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, fol. 365.

APPENDIX II

*A Sua Eccellenza Reverendissima Monsignor Gaetano Pace Forno
Arcivescovo di Rodi e Vescovo di Malta etc. etc.
E il suo Reverendissimo Capitolo.*

Eccellenza Reverendissima

Informato che nel Capitolo tenuto nello scorso Febbraio fu deciso che la dipintura della Cupola della Cattedrale dev'essere eseguita all'olio e da pannello nazionale mi faccio ardito di rispettosamente pregare l'E.V. e il Re.mo Capitolo affinché piacesse alla loro saggezza affidarmi, di preferenza, gli accennati lavori, assicurandole essere io impegnato ad applicarmi in modo che soddisfare le ragionevoli esigenze delle Belle arti nonchè quelle dell'E.V. e del Re.mo Capitolo. E penoso parlare di se e dei saggi che potrebbero essere indicati ai lumi dell'E.V. e del Re.mo Capitolo [p.60] onde indurle a giudicarmi e accordarmi l'impetrata preferenza. Però mi limito a sottomettere alla loro assennatezza i titoli rilasciatimi dal Celeberrimo Primo Professore Cattedratico, Commendatore Minardi,

⁸ *L'Ordine*, 17/7/1857.

⁹ Caruana Gatto, V. (1906), *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰ Please refer to main article.

¹¹ Borg, S., *Ix-Xewkija fi Ġrajjet il-Kappillani u l-Arciprieti tagħha*, Gozo 1978, p. 38, note 9b.

supplicandole eziandio di volere graziosamente prendere in considerazione la (f. 875) preziosa lettera del Prelodato Professore da me consegnata alla Deputazione in cui il grande Artista, unicamente per favorire l'antico suo allievo e non per essere a carico della cattedrale, offre di assistermi colla potente sua guida onde darmi con certo successo riuscire nei miei impegni. Egli sarebbe superfluo, Eccellenza e Re.mi Signori aggiungere che pensieri più nobili di quelli dettati da materiali profitti mi spingono a caldamente supplicarli affinché l'E.V. e il Re.mo Capitolo siano pienamente convinti che io accetterò quelle coscienziose offerte che verranno dalla loro equità e saggezza assegnate alle zelanti mie fatiche, desideroso innanzi tutto di cogliere questa solenne e pia occasione onde mostrare alla mia patria, e a quei signori che mi onorerebbero della loro fiducia, che lo zelo, sotto la potente scorta di un Minardi, potrebbe avere la sua utilità quale sia il genere dei servigi chiesti all'Artista dalle finali e sagge risoluzioni dell'E.V. e del Re.mo Capitolo.

Da ultimo si degnino l'E.V. e il Re.mo Capitolo onorarmi di un prezioso riscontro affinché, in un (f. 875v.) interesse sacro e pubblico, io possa ricominciare i miei carteggi col prelodato mio Professore.

Bagiano all'E.V. e alle Signorie loro Re.mi e Ill.mi la sacra mano col più profondo rispetto ho l'onore rassegnarmi

Dell'Eccellenza Vostra e del Re.mo Capitolo

Umilissimo e Dev.mo servo vostro

PAOLO CUSCHIERI

Valletta li 12 Marzo, 1859 (f. 876)

Ref: C.A. Minute Capitolari vol. 31 ff. 875-876.

APPENDIX III

Certifico io sottoscritto, che il Sig.r Paolo Cuschieri di Malta da che si recò in Roma per dedicarsi alla pittura attese con tale impegno [p.61] e vivissimo studio che in poco tempo fece rapidissimi progressi si nel ritrarre le statue greche si dal nudo vivo; onde in seguito potè darsi al comporre di propria invenzione. In questa parte egli sviluppo una vivace e ricca fantasia, e diede saggi rappresentante la morte de Padre di Adamo. Esercitatosi inoltre a dipinger dal vero, e a far bozzetti a olio di sua composizione, tra quali una Madonna del Rosario con Bell'Arte disposta, si merito distinta lode anche in questo.

Sicchè se la fortuna propizia gli presenterà occasioni da dimostrare in opere la sua abilità, certamente farà onore a se, e alla sua Patria.

In fede ... etc.

Roma 3 Marzo, 1847

Cav. Tom. Minardi Professore

Cattedratico di pittura della

Pontificia Accademia Romana

denominata di San Luca etc.

Ref: Cath. Arch., Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 878.

APPENDIX IV

Car.mo Sig. Cuschieri

Il Sig. Emanuele Cortis mi favorì la vostra car.ma in data del 20 Agosto, e subito vi rispondo sembrandomi importante non frapporre dilazione.

Direte a nome mio all'Ill.mo Sig. Canonico Schembri, che assai ragionevolmente, anzi ottimamente egli si adopera col prediligere voi a una impresa, che spetta ad artefice Maltese, e non a niun estero.

A nome mio ditegli ancora, che la difficoltà di dipingere a fresco e difficoltà insula e facilissima ad essere superata. Voi sapete con quante chiacchiere si compiangeva l'età nostra dagli ignoranti dell'arte asserendo, che erasi perduto il segreto di dipingere a fresco. Eppur ecco qui, in pochi mesi si è imparato, ossia si è presa quella pratica che non si possedeva, perchè mancavano le occasioni, che ora [p.62] si sono date. Tutti i miei scolari dipingono a fresco più facilmente che a oglio: Conzoni, Valeri, De Rosji, Gavardini, Marianicci, Dies, Pianelli, De Sanctis, Mariani, etc. dipingono nella Basilica di S. Paolo, e in altri luoghi con tutta facilità. Questo ultimo, Mariani, pochi mesi fa, nulla avea mai fatto; gli capitò occasione in S. Maria in Monticelli, accetto, ed ora ha fatto e fa a fresco opere stupende.

Il Sig. Canonico Schembri dunque in unione agli altri (f. 877) Sig.ri Deputati affidino a voi l'opera, di cui mi parlate, e venitesene a Roma, e in pochi mesi anche voi diverrete un abile frescante: ve ne do la mia parola. Così in pari tempo preparerete la composizione i cartoni gli studi, insomma tutto ciò che è indispensabile, e da cui dipende il buon esito dell'opera. Senza di ciò ni un frescante sebbene pratico, potrà mai giungere a far opera meritamente lodevole. Da bravo Sig.r Cuschieri l'occasione è ottima. Io con piacere farò quel poco che posso, quantunque io sia assai impiccato da impicci miei e più d'altrui.

Scusatemi della fretta con cui vi scrivo. Mille saluti al Sig.r Can. Schembri, e voi credetemi sempre

Roma 3 Settembre, 1858.

*Vostra Af.mo Amico
Tom. Prof. Minardi*

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, ff. 877-877v.

APPENDIX V

Ill.mi e Rev.mi Signori

Giuseppe Bonnici della Senglea Pittore allievo del celebre Cav.re Prof. Minardi conoscendo che le EE. VV Ill.me e Rev. me si propongono di far rinovare le pitture della volta e cupola della Chiesa Cattedrale, si esibisce per questi lavori di professione sua.

Egli propone di fare i suoi abbozzetti in Malta, o in Roma sotto gli occhi del suo Maestro, sottoporli al giudizio di qualunque artista o Accademia di scelta dell'EE. VV., ed in seguito se verranno [p.63] approvati eseguirli o a fresco o ad oglio, come meglio piacerà alle EE. VV. Ill.me Rev.me. L'Oratore avendo prima fiducia nella intelligenza e Saviezza delle EE. VV. le prega ossequiosamente che si degnino accogliere favorevolmente la sua esibizione.

E della Grazia

li 26 Febbraio, 1859

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, f. 879-879v.

APPENDIX VI

A Sua Eccellenza Rev.ma, ed al suo Capitolo della Santa Chiesa Cattedrale.

Umile Ricorso dell'Artista Ant. Falson.

Riverentemente espone, di essere pregato da alcuni suoi conoscenti, di presentare le sue umili esibizioni a V.E. Rev.ma, non che al suo Rev.mo Capitolo, contemporaneamente agli altri artisti, per dipingere la Cupola della Santa Chiesa Cattedrale. Pertanto il Ricorrente sottomette a V.E., ed alle loro Signoria Rev.ma, che insin dal 1832 ha dipinto dei quadri che ornano tuttora le Chiese di Malta in numero 37, oltre la volta della Collegiata di San Paolo Naufrago della Valletta, ad eccezioni dei tre quadri di mezzo, come pure ha eseguito altri per l'estero, e sempre furono approvati da V.E. Rev.ma e dagli altri Rev.mi Diocesani suoi antecessori come vi risulta dai fogli l'Ordine, e Portafoglio, nonchè nella venuta dei Commissari d'inchiesta ebbe l'onore dai medesimi per varie commissioni a Stu Maestà la Regina Vittoria, e per il Ministro delle Colonie. In seguite nella venuta della Regina Adelaide, il Governatore Buvery le presento alla medesima, e dalla quale venne anche honorato con altre commissioni, e di esseri pure nominato per esaminatore di disegno della Regia Università fino la morte del Pittore P. Paolo Caruana, nonchè d'aver avuto la commissione di eseguire varie pitture per servire di esemplari alla scuola Normale di disegno della Floriana, ed altre furono presentate nella universale Esposizione di Parigi, chi [p.64] furono applaudite come (f. 880) risulta dalla Gazzetta Malta Times No. 656; oltre ciò nell'Esposizione del 1857 non manco a non riprodurre dei suoi lavori in vario genere che i fogli l'Ordine, e il Portafoglio fecero le più alti ecomj per la loro buona riscita. Oltrechè di aver inviato varj altri studi di sua invenzione a Roma, tanto ai celebri Artisti Overbeck, cha a Minardi, per essere da loro corretti, i quali però l'approvarono e l'applaudirono. Onde da che, risulta che sia sufficientemente pratico nell'Arte fra i suoi Compatriotti per eseguire tale pittura, ed occorrendo e pronto alle prove autentiche del su narrato, non che di qualunque saggio di sua invenzione, o copia per assoggettarlo alla critica di qualunque Artista dell'Italia, solo o insieme con quegli degli altri concorrenti. Finalmente se l'E.V. Rev. ma ed il Rev.mo Capitolo vorranno mantenere l'istesso stile di quella Pittura fatta a fresco nelle dimensioni delle figure, e nell'istesso tono del colorito, che non diferiscono nulla la pittura di sotto in affresco, il Ricorrente si promette di doverla eseguire in tutti i modi a seconda dell'Arte da non comparire se sia dipinto in olio, o in affresco. Pertanto il Ricorrente non intenda con questa sua esibizione di voler avere l'incarigo della commissione per l'interesse ed altro, ma solo per lasciare la sua memoria ai posterì; e per questa pittura non domanda denaro di quel che verrà accordato prima della terminazione della pittura.

11 Aprile, 1859.

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, ff. 880-880v.

APPENDIX VII

Eccellenza Reverendissima

*Ricorso
dell'Artista Giovanni Gallucci*

Rappresenta umilmente

Che quando nell'Aprile dello scorso anno 1858 i Re.mi Sig.ri Can.ci Deputati per la restaurazione della Cupola della Sua Ven.da [p.65] Chiesa Cattedrale, erano per

deliberazione del Re.mo Capitolo della medesima sul punto di scrivere in Roma per procurare un'artista abile nella pittura a fresco, il ricorrente, sentita per caso questa risoluzione, scrisse ad essi Sig.ri Deputati, che essendo egli scuola Romana e conoscitore di tale metodo si offriva a tale opera, e per dare prova della sua capacità proponeva di fare a proprie spese un saggio, onde riuscito questo di piacimento, si entrerebbe in trattative per l'opera.

Che tale proposta fu accettata da Sig.ri Can.ci Deputati a condizione però che il saggio venisse spedito a Roma per il giudizio.

Che il Ricorrente accolse volentieri una tale condizione e fece subito varj saggi che furono veduti nel suo studio dai Sig.ri Deputati ed anche provati con acqua per assicurarsi del buon fresco; e quindi dopo di essersi alcuni di essi saggi presentati all'Eccellenza Vostra Rev.ma ed al Rev.mo Capitolo con rapporto favorevole dei Sig.ri Deputati, lo stesso Capitolo decreto nel detto rapporto, che se ne facesse la spedizione in Roma al Professore Cav. Minardi per il giudizio.

Che tale risoluzione fu comunicata al Ricorrente dal Rev.mo Sig. Canonico Don Emmanuele Rossignaud uno dei detti Deputati, il quale gli soggiunse ancora che il Rev.mo Sig. Canonico Schembri si era incaricato di scrivere al Sig. Minardi e fare la spedizione dei saggi medesimi, e che perciò il Ricorrente aspettasse l'avviso del detto Canonico Schembri per andare d'accordo per la spedizione medesima:— che per consenso ancora dello stesso Capitolo, il ricorrente avrebbe potuto rifare o cambiare a suo piacimento i medesimi saggi, che indi riprese al suo studio per metterli in ordine per l'imbarco.

Che dopo varie settimane che il Ricorrente non aveva ricevuto alcun avviso, si portò dal detto Sig. Canonico Rossignaud dicendogli di non aver più saputo nulla sul proposito ed esso Sig. Canonico gli disse che stasse tranquillo ed aspettasse, come appunto fece il Ricorrente.

Che essendo il Ricorrente negli or scorsi giorni stato sul punto di lasciare quest'Isola per poche settimane, onde non nascerebbe equivoco in caso si cercasse di lui, si è portato nuovamente da esso [p.66] Sig. Canonico Rossignaud, ed in questa volta è stato dal medesimo gentilmente assicurato di aver elgi già di sua spontaneità sollecitato la definizione.

Che però non più tardi di parecchi giorni esso Ricorrente non senza sua sorpresa è venuto a sapere di aver il sullodato Capitolo, dimentico delle trattative col Ricorrente seguite, con deliberazione del 26 dell'or scorso mese deliberato che la pittura si eseguisse non più a fresco ma in olio.

Che la saviezza di V.E.R.ma comprenderà bene quanto una tale notizia sia riuscita dolente al Ricorrente, vedendosi leso nel decoro, nel dritto e nell'interesse.

Che però il Ricorrente si prende la libertà di ricorrere a V.E.R.ma non per reclamo di questi danni ma per sottoporre alla stessa un progetto conciliativo a parer suo tutto decoroso al lodato Capitolo, ed al Ricorrente convenevole da una parte e sfavorevole dall'altra.

Il progetto è il seguente.

Che esso Ricorrente come avea fatto dei saggi a fresco sarebbe pronto a farne ad olio, e sarebbe ancora contento quando piacesse al Capitolo di dar luogo agli artisti dell'Isola onde concorrere seco lui per un tale lavoro. Accettato un tale progetto sarebbe facile la sua esecuzione poichè se il Capitolo dasse a copiare informa colossale un bran del bozzetto del Manno, ed obbligasse di più il concorrente a spedire tali copie a proprie spese ad una accademia straniera dal Capitolo stesso prescelta, il medesimo non entrerebbe nè in imbarazzi, nè in dispendi.

Che il Ricorrente e tutto lusingato, che un tal progetto sarà ben accolto non solo dall'Eccellenza V.R.ma ma ancora dal Re.mo Capitolo. Ma per ogni caso in contrario esso Ricorrente volendo mantenere illesi i suoi diritti formalmente deve dichiarare che non si

debba giammai intendersi di avere egli in nessuna maniera rinunciato ad alcuno dei diritti dallo stesso già acquistati.

E pertanto esso Ricorrente nello atto de umiliare a V.E.R.ma le cose sopra esposte ossequiosamente la prega perchè si compiacesse accogliere la sua domanda e dare per tale effetto gli occorrenti provvedimenti.

Valletta, 2 Febbraio 1859.

[p.67] Refs: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolari 1857-59, Vol. 31, fols. 869-872v.

Comunicantiur preses nostru Re.mo Capitolo datum Vallettae in Pal. Archiep di 3 Februari 1859.

F.C. Arch. Ep. Melitis.

Ref: as above fol. 869.

APPENDIX VIII

Capitular Meeting 3rd February, 1938.

Imprimis lecta fuit epistola Pictoris A. Casanova tenoris sequentis: No. 1
Quo lecta Rev.mi Capitulares responderunt supersedendum.

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolare 1938, Vol. 83 (unpaginated)

Comm. Prof. A. Casanova
Bologna – Via Venezia 2.

Rev.mo Signor Cancelliere,

La di lei gradita lettera del 20-2-37 mi ha fatto vivo piacere per quel che riguarda la decisione di dare corso alla esecuzione del mio progetto eseguito sul modello, in misura della Cupola.

Ho pensato a tutto quello che mi sarebbe necessario per la preparazione, la esecuzione e la collocazione della pittura della Cupola della Cattedrale ad olio su tela da applicarsi sulla volta e devo comunicarle che se il mio grande piacere e subordinato alla naturale ambizione di legare il mio nome alla Gloriosa Cattedrale, ciò nondimeno i calcoli fatti, non solo non mi consentirebbero di diminuire il prezzo del mio vecchio preventivo, ma nemmeno di lasciarlo quale fu presentato.

Qui in Italia il prezzo di tutte le materie, e di lavoro e delle cose [p.68] necessarie alla vita è aumentato, perciò sono costretto a chiedere io pure l'aumento del 30% sull'intera somma da me preventivata. Come ebbi a dire in'altra mia tanto per loro norma ho lavorato tanto tempo e tuttora lavoro nella Basilica Antoniana di Padova, dove mi è sempre stato corrisposto £1,300 al Mq ed ora sto trattando l'aumento del suddetto. Questo stesso compenso mi fu corrisposto per la pittura ad olio su tela ed applicata nella Chiesa di Marsascala a Malta. Come la S. Vostra vede misurando la Cupola della Cattedrale che è di Mq. 240 circa, anche con l'aumento richiesto sarebbe più che equamente compensato il lavoro della Cupola della Cattedrale.

Con devoti ossequi

A. Casanova

al Rev. Sac. Filippo Muscat
Cancelliere Capitolare
Cattedrale - Malta

(N.B. This letter post marked 26/1/38)

Ref: Cath. Arch. Minute Capitolare 1938 Vol. 83 (unpaginated)