

A Note on the St. John Co-Cathedral Marble Tombstones: The Artisans, Foreign and Maltese

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One cannot but feel hesitant in writing on the tombstones, masterpieces of marble, much like varied marquetry work in St John's when one can consult the long standing volume 'The Church of St John in Valletta' by Hannibal Scicluna, a composition which must necessarily remain an excellent and remarkable publication.¹

The aim of this brief study is to modestly review the documentation principally in the notarial archives concerning the tombstones, mainly in the period 1678 to 1819 and the marble craftsmen, local and foreign, who executed their masterpieces so expertly (see Table 1). Though it has been only possible to trace in those documentary archives evidence for some eighteen tombstones, it is to be presumed that most of the others largely followed a similar pattern of commissioning:

- i) some form of contract or a privately written agreement stipulating the names of the parties,
- ii) a time-limit set for the undertaking,
- iii) the price to be eventually paid at times in instalments or otherwise in full on termination of work, and
- iv) the supply of designs, none of which could be traced.

One may wonder at the paucity of recorded public deeds that could be traced, when it was so customary to resort to such means in similar dealings between customer and supplier of services. It could be that some tomb stones were of foreign workmanship and then transhipped to Malta. Private agreements would render it difficult or impossible for future posterity to discover the documentation.

Whatever the reason, the artistic splendour contained in the laying of the polychrome marble pavement must evoke admiration for the artisans because through

* I would like to thank Monsignor J. Azzopardi for translating for me a couple of deeds and Professor G. Wettinger for his useful suggestions and comments.

1. H. P. Scicluna, *The Church of St John in Valletta*, Rome 1955. See also N. De Piro and D. Cilia, *The Temple of the Knights of Malta*, Italy 1999, 124-7; P. Cassar, 'Anatomical errors in the lapidary of the Co-Cathedral of St John at Valletta', *St Luke's Hospital Gazette*, ix, 1 (1974), 13-20; G. Bonello, 'Further foot-notes for a history of time-keeping in Malta', *The Sunday Times* [Malta], 17 July 1994; *id.*, 'Art and Symbols in St John's Tombstones', in *Art in Malta Discoveries and Recoveries*, Malta 1999, 160-70.

their exquisite workmanship they have bequeathed to us real grandeur interwoven with the history of Maltese culture and art, here visible in its entirety. Designs in attractive colours intersect the marble tombstones consisting of one piece or, more often, two slabs of marble. These are richly inlaid with the coat-of-arms of the respective knights, each buried in his particular grave, with inscriptions extolling his virtues and traits of character, with spoils of victories, skeletons and skulls symbolising death and eternity, lions and stars to demonstrate valour, and other common artifacts to express the profane history of the Order of St John. Meanwhile these tombstones, fully evocative of the baroque art then prevailing in Malta, would convey a spiritual message rather than details of the human body.

The Order often commissioned known marble artisans to enhance the decoration of their church and cover the vaults with marble monuments. In the employment of foreign marble craftsmen, one can meet two types: those who, on undertaking the task, had come over to Malta to check on the work involved and sign the necessary legal documents, and others who settled here for good, often after getting married to a Maltese girl. On 1 February 1678 the marble worker, Diego di Tuccio,² agreed with the knight, Antonio Defay Latour Maubourg, from the Langue of Alvergnia, to fashion a tombstone and lay it on the grave of Commendatore Fra Renato de Mesonseville, then buried in St John's.³ At the time, Detuccio was living in Malta and he promised to execute the work within 4 months for 110 scudi of which 90 were received in advance.⁴ Detuccio could have been engaged elsewhere in other local marble work.

Another foreign marble craftsman who used his artistic talents to decorate in marble tombstones and altars in the Maltese churches was Bartholomeo Bambaci from Palermo. Amongst his works there is a tombstone in St John's, made at the request of Commendatore Fra Jacobo de Fonville Descreinville, a French knight.⁵

This tombstone was ordered on 17 August 1678 to be duly placed on the grave of Fra Enrico Destampes Velencaii, the Gran Prior of France. Its agreed price of 120 scudi, was paid in instalments, the last of which was effected on 31 January 1680.⁶ It

2. Diego di Tuccio was a Messinese from Sicily but was now living at Valletta. His marriage settlement with Francesca Benenato daughter of Antonino and Agata also from Messina was drawn up on 27 January 1675: N(otarial) A(rchives) at V(alletta), Not(ary). G. Felici, R260/36 (1673-76), ff. 119-120 (January 1674-March 1676). On 13 September 1677, Diego received from Antonino Benenato 83 Sicilian *oncie* which was part of his daughter's dowry: NAV, Not. G. Callus, R125/26, ff. 122-123.
3. NAV, Not. T. Agius, R11/51, ff. 644-645.
4. On 13 July 1678, Detuccio received 20 scudi to settle the balance: *ibid.*, f. 644, a marginal entry.
5. *Ibid.*, R11/52, ff. 1380-1381.
6. *Ibid.*, all marginal entries. Bartholomeo died between July 1679 and January 1680, when his daughter, Hieronima, appeared on behalf of her mother Margarita.

was also agreed between the parties that, in case circumstances changed and the patron opted for a tombstone elsewhere, Bambaci would have to abide by a new design accordingly.

Two options were open to foreign marble workers who had not settled in Malta - they could either execute the work here from imported marble slabs or otherwise do all the work abroad in their own personal workshop to be later despatched for assembly, inlaying, and decoration. When a fairly large commitment was involved, it was preferable to settle here, at least till all the work involved was accomplished. These procedures enabled the marble workers to check on the overall progress of the projected work and its maintenance.

In 1658, the Florentine sculptor, Vitale Covate, in partnership with the stone-cutter or carver, Ferrante Vanelli, undertook it upon themselves to embellish the monument dedicated to Grand Master Jean Lascaris Castellar with marble slabs. These were to be carved and inlaid with interlaces and inserts, all imported from Messina, where they were then living, at a cost of 600 scudi.⁷ Seven years later, in 1665, Covate was again commissioned to work in marble the balustrated balcony over the main entrance of St John's church.⁸ Though these works may signify his renown amongst the members of the Order, it has not been possible to trace documentary evidence regarding the execution of any tombstones by him.

Maestro Antonino Amato with his children Domenico, Francesco, Gio Maria, and Giuseppe, all from Messina, were engaged at one time or another between 1741 and 1747⁹ in marble work in Malta especially at St John's.¹⁰ In 1741 the sumptuous marble covering of the eight piers of the Oratory for which the Prior of Santo Stefano, Fra Don Andrea Fortunato di Giovanni, had agreed to pay 400 Sicilian *oncie*, was commissioned.¹¹ The obligation between the parties also listed all the details regarding length, width and depth of the marble slabs, their colour and the place of

7. *Ibid.*, R11/26, ff. 606-606(8), 8 January 1658. Note f. 606 are all numbered 606. See also D. Cutajar, *Malta: History and Works of Art of St John's Church Valletta*, Malta 1989, 67-8.
8. NAV, Not. A. Dello Re, R227/16, ff. 30-31 v, 3 November 1665. See also Cutajar, 11.
9. On 11 January 1747, Giovanni Amato together with Santo Arena arrived in Malta to work on the tabernacle of the altar in the church dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory at Valletta: N(ational) A(rchives) of M(alta) at Rabat, *Libretto delle Pratiche de Bastimenti con la nota del loro equipaggio e passa gieri Gennaro 1747*.
10. It cannot however, be shown that Francesco himself had actually visited Malta.
11. NAV, Not. G. Callus, R126/43 (1740-42), ff. 510 v -513 v (1740-41), 5 July 1741.

importation.¹² By September 1742¹³ the Amato brothers had already been paid either overseas or locally an amount totalling 1,705 *scudi 9 tari 1 grano* for the purchase and cutting of marble slabs from Messina.¹⁴ A final payment of 414 *scudi 1 tari 16 grani* was made to the Amato brothers on 9 January 1743.¹⁵

Antonino Damato obliged himself with Fra Don Francesco Villalonga Caportella, Prior of Catalonia, to construct a tombstone out of a single slab measuring about nine and a-half palmi in length and five and a-half palmi in width and conforming to the design and inscription supplied by the patron himself.¹⁶ This tombstone was to be placed at St John's at a total price of 180 *scudi*.

Another Florentine marbler in Malta was Francesco Cerotti. He arrived in Malta on 8 December 1729 on the Order's warship, San Giovanni, accompanied by Francesco Formelli, probably his assistant,¹⁷ to carry out some embellishments on the main altar of the parish church in Zebbug.¹⁸ Their stay here was rather brief for they were issued with the patente of departure for Leghorn on 29 January 1730, after taking the necessary measurements and designs of the altar.¹⁹ Again no documentation regarding the construction of tombstones in St John's could be found.

Maltese marble artisans for whom documentary evidence survives include Giuseppe Casanova, Gio Maria Gilibert, Gregorio Durante and his children, Claudio Durante, Carlo Durante and Felice Buhagiar. The same level of skill as was characterised by the foreign marble artists was attained by them in their works of art and little sculptures cut of *pietre dure*. This artistic production built around inlaid marble slabs emblazoned with memorial shields of the dead was also destined to augment the skill and prestige of Maltese craftsmanship. According to traditional practice they had also to sign the necessary notarial deeds when accepting commissions for tombstones. These con-

12. One must note that Antonino's children while in Messina were bound to help in the sawing of the marble slabs otherwise all other work in connection with this marble covering were to be executed in Malta under the supervision of the father, Antonino, as approved by the patron himself and by an architect who enjoyed the trust of both parties: *ibid*.
13. On 28 April 1742, Domenico Amato and his brother Gio Maria together with another marble worker, Vincenzo Fiorito, arrived in Malta on the martingale under captain Giuseppe Assanti. The Amatos left the island on 16 February 1743 presumably because the work was finished: NAM, Manuscript unnumbered, List of Persons arriving in Malta from May 1724 to August 1743, f. 22.
14. NAV, Not. G. Callus, R126/44 (1742-44), ff. 12 v -13 v (1742-43), 13 September 1742.
15. *Ibid.*, ff. 212-213 (1742-43).
16. *Ibid.*, R126/43 (1740-42), ff. 514-515 (1740-41), 6 July 1741.
17. NAM, Manuscript unnumbered, List of Persons arriving in Malta from May 1724 to August 1743, no foliation.
18. L. Vella, *Storja ta' Haz-Zebbug*, L. Cachia (ed.), Malta 1986, 43. Some of his details are incorrect.
19. NAM, Magna Curia Castellaniae, Registrum Patentarum, vol. 19 (1727-1734), no foliation.

tained details of size, number of slabs to be used, method of payment and duration of time for accomplishment. Though they had to follow the design supplied or that drawn by the artisan himself, none of these sketches have yet been found. The design to be embossed on the tombstone of Fra Luis Loneri Dumoli²⁰ executed by Giuseppe Casanova was painstakingly explained in the terms of the deed; never was it so minutely explained anywhere else.²¹

Giuseppe Casanova, born in a family renowned for stone carving, kept to his family's occupation.²² Between 1682 and 1684 he was commissioned to produce two marble tombstones dedicated respectively to Fra Luis Loneri Dumoli and Fra Francesco Conte de Wratislao. As in other works of this sort, creativity of decorative and compositional symbolism were involved to attract attention and extol knightly virtues: strength, courage and valour in the face of death. These were achieved with the allegorical figures of red lions, crown and cross, and an epitaph all surrounded by a garland. Meanwhile, Wratislao's tombstone was to be similar in dimension to that dedicated to Hosterhausen. Expenses for Dumoli's tombstone, 125 *scudi*, were to be defrayed from one-fifth of the inheritance pertaining to Fra Giacche de Bonenville, Prior of France, as legacy;²³ while that of Wratislao amounting to 100 *scudi* was paid by the Common Treasury.²⁴ The commissioners always reserved the right to order the tombstone elsewhere if it did not meet their approval. In Dumoli's case, the commissioner, Bonenville, explicitly stated that he would bring it from Palermo at Casanova's expense, if he failed to meet the contractual terms.

20. The precise name as given by Scicluna, tombstone no 85 is, Fra Louis Le Nourry Dusmesny Pontavray.
21. '... una lapide del monumento d'esso f - Signor Cavaliere Dumoli di marmoro bianco di longhezza palmi nove e mezzo, e di larghezza palmi cinque e mezzo, e di grossezza un quarto di palmo con due armi, una nel capo di campo rosso con le due corone d'insegni bianchi e ore stelle due in capo, e l'altra di sotto bianche sostenuta di due palmi verdi e corona d'intorno col morione in faccia, e la Croce, e l'altra sotto l'epitafio col campo bianco con due leoni rossi in mezzo sostenuta con due leoni rossi con la corona e croce, e morione di faccia, e l'epitafio in mezzo in campo bianco, e l'iscrizione d'epitafio, e tutto il campo di nero, e negli quattro cantoneri di frigio con una testa di morte con l'ossa e sagarella, e nella met ... delli frigi l'ossa con la sagarella, e quattro fior delisi al cantone, à cio in conformit ... del disegno ...': NAV, Not. P. Fiore, R265/10 (1680-82), ff. 112 v -114 v (1681-82), 12 April 1682.
22. On the Casanova family cf. E. Montanaro, 'Materials for the life of Francesco Vincenzo Zahra', in J. Azzopardi (ed.), *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773*, Malta 1986, 31; G. Aquilina, *Il-Gimgha l-Kbira tal-Belt*, Malta 1986, 19 footnote 27 and 85 footnote 24; E. Montanaro, 'L-Iskultura f' Malta matul is-seklu sbatax', in *Spiritu u Hajja: Rivista ta' Kultura Frangiskana*, no. 14 (Lulju 1989), 160-4; id., 'The building of a new church dedicated to Saint Julian in 1682', *Melita Historica*, xi, 1 (1992), 35-58; and V. Borg, 'Christian Heritage and Malta Stone', in *Cathedral and Diocesan Museums: Cross Roads of Faith and Culture*, Malta 1995, 95-7.
23. On 27 August 1682, Giuseppe received 50 *scudi* while the remaining balance of 75 *scudi* was paid the following year on 5 September 1683: NAV, Not. P. Fiore, R265/10 (1680-82), ff. 112 v -113 (1681-82), marginal entries.
24. NAV, Not. A. Dello Re, R227/22 (1682-84), ff. 121 v -122 v (1683-84), 28 January 1684.

In the span of 40 years between 1686 and 1726, Gio Maria Gilibert, a nephew of the artisan Giuseppe Casanova, produced at least three tombstones to be placed in St John's. These were dedicated respectively to Fra Giovanni Hettore de la Tour Maubourg,²⁵ Admiral Fra Averardo de Medici,²⁶ and Fra Felice Conte Lando, Prior of Barletta.²⁷

While at work on these tombstones, Gio Maria could have been assisted by his brother, Salvatore, though no specific contract relating to him personally could be traced. The two brothers were commissioned in the 1680s to do these four pillars: one in the pulpit, another in the frontispiece bearing the canopy of the Grand Master, and two in the chancel.²⁸ For this work, they received 583 *scudi* reimbursed according to the wishes of the late Grand Master Nicola Cotoner.

Regarding the tombstone for Maubourg, it was the Common Treasury that defrayed its price of 180 *scudi*. The two knights, Fra Ferdinando Rosermini and Fra Michel Angelo Pagnini, who had commissioned the tombstone in honour of Fra Felice Conte Lando, had chosen Paolo Nucefaro to sign the deed on their behalf. Being a layman, he preferred to employ the services of a public notary rather than one engaged with the Order. In this case, the expenses incurred were 200 *scudi*.²⁹

Members of the Durante family, other talented marble artisans of the eighteenth century, also specialised in tombstones and embellishment work in St. John's church. Contractual obligations for at least another nine tombstones and other interior marble decorations have been encountered. Claudio Durante, the nephew of Gio Maria Gilibert on his father's side, continued the tradition of marble craftsmanship through apprenticeship training, very probably in the workshop of his uncle. Between 1729 and 1743 he was commissioned for at least six of these tombstones, namely:

25. *Ibid.*, R227/23 (1684-86), ff. 424 v -425 v (1685-86), 30 August 1686.

26. Gilibert received 170 *scudi* in full and final settlement of this tombstone. The actual order for this tombstone could not be traced: *ibid.*, R227/28 (1694-96), ff. 102-102 v (1695-96), 17 November 1695.

27. NAV, Not. G. F. Bagini, R43/4 (1724-26), ff. 190 v -191 v (1725-26), 22 August 1726.

28. '... delli quattro pilastri di pietra meschia i' sia porfido di Sant' Eufemia ...': NAV, Not. A. Dello Re, R227/24 (1686-88), ff. 257-257 v (1687-88), 28 August 1688.

29. One must note as well that a signatory witness was Fra Romano Carapecchia, an architect who might have possibly supplied the required design. Between 1729 and 1737 he had at least supplied designs to three other tombstones belonging respectively to Figuera, Pinto and Solaro, three knights of the Order: D. De Lucca, *Carapecchia Master of Baroque Architecture in early eighteenth century Malta*, Malta 1999, 212 and 217. See also J. A. Tonna and D. De Lucca, *Romano Carapecchia Studies in Maltese Architecture*, Malta 1975 and L. Mahoney, *5000 Years of Architecture in Malta*, Malta 1996, 42, 170, 175, 311-2.

- i) one dedicated to Commendatore Fra Innocenzo Destrestehein, commissioned for 165 *scudi* by his heir executor, Fra Filippo Guillelmo, Conte de Nesselrode, the Gran Prior of the German Langue, which was to be ready within 8 months;³⁰
- ii) one dedicated to Bal Fra Hironimo Bagnani for which Claudio was paid 175 *scudi* through the procurator Father Francesco Protopsalti;³¹
- iii) another one dedicated to Bal Sciasber, commissioned for 200 *scudi* by Fra Ferdinando Baron de Stadl, procurator of Fra Filippo Guillelmo, Conte de Nesselrode, the Gran Prior of the German Langue, and to be ready within 15 months;³²
- iv) a tombstone ordered by Magnifico Michel Angelo Scianet from Valletta, for the late Bal Fra Fabritio Maria Visconti at the price of 150 *scudi*; with its size determined by the dimensions of the vault already prepared in St John's;³³
- v) another for 185 *scudi* dedicated to the late Italian knight Fra Francesco Maria Ferretti commissioned by the executors of his will Fra Bartholomeo Rull and Fra Vittorio Rocchi;³⁴
- vi) finally, one for 170 *scudi* dedicated to Fra Paul de Felines de la Reaudie, commissioned by his surviving nephew Fra Giovanni de Felines through his procurator Fra Giliberto Jousset.³⁵

The entrepreneurial patronage provided by the client procurators led to the creation of St John's famous marble floor besides the other architectural and chapel ornamentation. Claudio was deeply involved in them. In 1739 he was commissioned by Fra Fabrizio Franconi to construct the facade of the altar dedicated to St George according to a design provided for him.³⁶ Durante accepted several conditions concerning the colours of the marble, their transportation and the use of Gozo 'marble'. For this workmanship a total of 3,700 *scudi* was earmarked. In 1745 he was

30. NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R343/29, ff. 117 v -118 v, 7 November 1729. A year later Claudio received the final amount of 115 *scudi* after he had been paid through different private receipts: *ibid.*, f. 117 v, a marginal entry, 28 November 1730.

31. NAV, Not. F. Alfano, R15/4 (1730-32), ff. 82-82 v (1730-31), 29 October 1730.

32. NAV, Not. G. D. Chircop, R182/34, ff. 332-333, 12 March 1732. Some fifteen months later, Claudio received 51 *scudi*: *ibid.*, f. 332, a marginal entry, 6 July 1733.

33. NAV, Not. G. Callus, R126/41 (1736-38), ff. 264-265 (1736-37), 27 February 1737. In May 1738 Durante received 75 *scudi* as a final settlement: *ibid.*, f. 264, a marginal entry.

34. NAV, Not. G. D. Chircop, R182/40, ff. 780-781, 21 August 1738. On 13 May 1739, Durante received the remaining balance of 100 *scudi* in final settlement: *ibid.*, f. 780, a marginal entry.

35. NAV, Not. G. F. Dos, R238/9, ff. 857-858, 21 July 1743.

36. '... lavorare e scolpire la facciata di marmo nell'altare di S(an) Giorgio ... colli lavori, intagli ed armi giusta il disegno ...': NAV, Not. G. D. Chircop, R182/41 (1738-40), ff. 820 v -822, 12 October 1739.

again engaged for another project by the Balì of Santo Stefano, Andrea Fortunato di Giovanni. Durante was to decorate with marble the entrance to the Oratory, a project worth 2,800 *scudi*.³⁷ It was stipulated that the entrance door was to be modelled on that of the altar-facade dedicated to St. George found in the chapel of Aragon mentioned above. He also had to correct the alignment of a tombstone inside the Oratory and polish it. Meanwhile Claudio was becoming more widely known for, in less than 25 years, he was commissioned by the Cathedral Chapter of Mdina to decorate and inlay with marble most of the altars.³⁸ Similar work in marble was also undertaken by him in other Maltese churches.³⁹

The Durante family also included Claudio's uncle Gregorio and Gregorio's children - Gio Antonio, Filippo, Carlo, Lorenzo and Ignazio - all of whom were engaged in other marble work in St John's and other Maltese churches.⁴⁰ At least two tombstones in St John's can be attributed to Gregorio and his children. One tombstone ordered in 1737 and dedicated to Fra Giuseppe de Contreras e Villaruel was commissioned by the procurator Fra Giuseppe Vella at a cost of 225 *scudi*.⁴¹ On 22 November 1751, the other tombstone dedicated to Fra Alfonso Loppin was commissioned to the marble artisan, Gio Antonio Durante, by Father Giorgio Grech.⁴² Celjdonia Maria Silvestri, as a sign of gratitude towards the knight, defrayed the expenses which amounted to 70 *scudi*. This tombstone, as per design agreed upon, was laid on the grave of the late knight, then located at the entrance to the Oratory of St John's.

37. '... dover esso Durante fare l'ornamento della porta nella parte esteriore dell'Oratorio della Maggiore Chiesa Conventuale di detta Sacra Religione di marmo di diversi colori somiglianti a quelli della Capella di S(an) Giorgio ...': NAV, Not. B. M. Callus, R124/1 (1744-46), ff. 34 v -36 v (1745-46), 30 September 1745.

38. Borg, 102-5.

39. M. Buhagiar and S. Fiorini, *Mdina: The Cathedral City of Malta*, Malta 1996, i, 259, 263 and ii, 374; J. Azzopardi, 'The Old Seminary Chapel, Mdina', in *Antoine de Favray 1706-1798: An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings*, Malta 1982, 44-7; E. Montanaro, '1754: Hidma tal-marmista Claudio Durante fil-Bazilika ta' San Gorg', in *Festi San Gorg Ghawdex 1989*, 23-7; and A. Bonnici, *L-Isla Fi Grajjiet il-Bazilika-Santwarju ta' Marija Bambina*, Malta 1986, ii, 250-1 and 362.

40. Buhagiar and Fiorini, i, 258 and 269; Vella, 51; E. Montanaro, 'Id-Dekorazzjoni bl-irham tal-kappella tal-Erwieh fil-Bazilika ta' San Gorg', in *Festi San Gorg Ghawdex 1987*, 27-39; Dun G. Azzopardi, 'Opri fl-irham L-Altar Maggur tal-lum u ta' Qabel', in *Programm tal-festi ta' Corpus Domini u San Pawl, Rabat 1988*, no. 12, 15-9.

41. NAV, Not. G. D. Chircop, R182/39, ff. 229 v -231 v, 8 January 1737. A year later Gregorio received 150 *scudi*, the remaining balance of the 225 *scudi*: *ibid.*, ff. 229 v -230, a marginal entry.

42. '... quale dovr ... essere della lunghezza del sito occupato dalla di lui bara, e nel vacante delli due lati d'essa lapide dovr ... fornire quelli marmi bianchi, che bisogneranno, et in tutto, e per tutto uniformarsi al disegno gia fatto ...': NAV, Not. D. G. Bonavita, R62/38, ff. 212 v -214. On 17 December 1751, Durante received the remaining balance of 40 *scudi*: *ibid.*, ff. 212 v -213, marginal entry.

Gregorio and his sons, notably Gio Antonio and Filippo, were engaged elsewhere in St John's. The balustrade of the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Philermo with its marble stairs and base was one of their masterpieces. They were paid 575 *scudi* for it.⁴³ In the 1760s Gio Antonio undertook to carry out some marble decorations in the chapel dedicated to St Sebastian. The two flight of steps in front of the altar were to be newly constructed, in shape and variety of colouring similar to those in the chapel of St George. However regarding the altar itself, dimension, style and selection of marble slabs were to be in conformity with those found in the altar dedicated to St. James.⁴⁴

All workmanship for 350 *scudi*, was to be executed at least 3 days prior to the Saint's feast, that is 20 January.⁴⁵

Carlo Durante, son of Filippo,⁴⁶ in 1819 was paid 300 *scudi* by notary Alessandro Patrizio Spiteri for a marble tombstone for the grave of the Gran Prior of Ibernina, Bali di Lessa, Don Francesco Carvalho Pinto.⁴⁷ It was a century of fame for the Durante families; their concern, attention and dedication to craftsmanship survived well after the departure of the Order of St. John from Malta.

Other renowned eighteenth century Maltese marble artisans such as Antonio Nicolas,⁴⁸ Saverio Camilleri,⁴⁹ Giuseppe Dalli,⁵⁰ and Giuseppe Cordina do not seem to have participated in the construction of any tombstones in St John's. They were employed instead in other Maltese churches. The designs of the tombstones in St. John's must have occasionally led to the commissioning of similar ones in other

43. '... la scalina di marmo bianco di Carrara, le balustre di marmo rosso detto pietra libici di Trapani, ò sia Diaspero di Sicilia, e la base ò sia appoggio di marmo negro ammacchiato col giallo ...': NAV, Not. B. M. Callus, R124/2 (1746-48), ff. 252-253 (1746-47), 22 June 1747.

44. '... lavorare due scalinate, e bradella intiera di marmo bianco un altare di marmo con sua lapida intiera ...': NAV, Not. G. Prevost R403/3 (1760- June 1765), ff. 76-77 (1762-1763), 9 April 1763.

45. On 23 January 1764, Gio Antonio received the final settlement of 100 *scudi* as he had already been paid in instalments during the execution of the work: *ibid.*, ff. 77-78.

46. Carlo Durante was the last marble craftsman bearing this surname. There were other lesser members of the Durante family such as Giorgio Durante son of Leonardo and Lorenzo Durante son of Giovanni: A. Bonnici, *L-Isla Fi Grajjiet il-Bazilika-Santwarju ta' Marija Bambina*, Malta 1991, iii, 49 and 53. In January 1778 Maddalena, Carlo's sister, got married to Gio Maria Darmanin and one of their offspring, Giuseppe, was apprenticed to his uncle, giving rise to the Darmanin family of marble artisans: *ibid.*, 113, 143, 149, 167 and 200. See also J. Micallef, *Hal-Luqa Niesha u Grajjietha*, Malta 1975, 249 and 250; S. Abela, *Il-Karmelitani fl-Imdina (1659-1994)*, Malta 1994, 125-6; P. Cassar, 'A lady visitor to Malta in 1839', *The Sunday Times* [Malta], 8 May 1994.

47. NAV, Not. C. Sammut, R425/3, ff. 623 v -624, 5 September 1819.

48. Vella, 61.

49. Buhagiar and Fiorini, ii, 374.

50. Vella, 76. However, note Dalli Censu error for Adrario Censu.

churches. In 1756 Fra Gio Battista Pizzuto on behalf of Catarina Grima, his grandmother, contracted Antonio Nicolas to produce a tombstone on the design of the one for Fra Lorenzo Ildaris,⁵¹ probably the one in St. John's, and an additional ornamental freize, all for 110 *scudi*.⁵²

In 1872 Baron Calcedonio Azzopardi petitioned the civil and ecclesiastical authorities for permission to place a tombstone in St John's in memory of his late grandfather, Sir Giuseppe Nicola Zammit, a member of the Order of St. Michael and St. George,⁵³ in accordance with the terms of Zammit's will.⁵⁴ Felice Buhagiar, the marble artisan, worked this tombstone in 1872 and was paid 24 pounds 4 shillings 4 pence for all his work. The epitaph contains no symbolism but only the cross.

As time passed, the marble tombstones of St John's naturally needed occasional cleaning and repair which could only be competently done by suitably skilled artisans. In December 1819 the Church authorities paid 10 *scudi* to Giuseppe Darmanin for the repair of, and inlay with marble, the passage leading to the sacristy previously occupied by the tombstone on the grave of Bali Carvalios.⁵⁵

In May⁵⁶ and September 1829⁵⁷ C. Giuseppe Fabri was similarly employed to restore nine tombstones, three of which were found in the chapel dedicated to St. James.⁵⁸

51. This tombstone is numerated 344 in Scicluna's book. I would like to thank Professor Monsignor C. Cassar for translating for me the inscription found on this tombstone.
52. NAV, Not. G. Morales, R373/7 (1756-58), ff. 67 v -68 (1756-57), 19 November 1756. A year later Nicolas received 90 *scudi* as final settlement for his work: *ibid.*, f. 67 v, a marginal entry, 31 October 1757.
53. A. E. Abela, *The Order of St. Michael and St. George in Malta and Maltese Knights of the British Realm*, Malta 1988, 15-6, 21, 25, 59 and 79.
54. NAV, Not. G. A. Parodi, 1002/175, pp. 1933-1941, 9 July 1877. See also NAM, Chief Secretary to Government, Petition no. 6112/a/1872.
55. Archives of the Cathedral at Mdina, Dep(ositaria). vol. 49 (1818-20), f. 1074.
56. *Ibid.*, vol. 54 (1828-30), f. 408 v
57. *Ibid.*, f. 563.
58. Although the amounts paid were sometimes minimal, yet this process of restoration was a continuous one and occurred in August-September 1822: *ibid.*, vol. 51 (1822-24), f. 167; in June 1824: *ibid.*, vol. 52 (1824-26), f. 135 v; in June 1836: *ibid.*, vol. 58 (1836-38), f. 124 and other examples could be cited. Very often the amounts were spent on plaster (chalk), linseed-oil, glue and paint colour to repair the cavities caused by the dislodgement of loose marble pieces and thus minimize extensive damages to the tombstones.

Some time before October 1825, the ecclesiastical authorities contacted Giuseppe Hyzler⁵⁹ and Michele Busuttil,⁶⁰ as professor artists, to make a detailed description of all the paintings, mausoleums and sepulchral tombstones existing in St John, with a view, most probably, to deliberate on the preparatory work intended for the oncoming restoration works.⁶¹

Two major projects were tackled and terminated nearly simultaneously between 1835 and 1837: the renovation and restoration work in the chapel dedicated to the Conversion of St Paul and the tombstones on the right aisle of the church. These were undertaken mainly by the marble craftsmen Giuseppe Darmanin and his children.⁶² The vast programme of work undertaken in the chapel of St. Paul entailed a total outlay of 3,466 *scudi* 6 *tari* 11 *grani* of which some 65 to 70 per cent were devoted to the payment of wages.⁶³

The restoration of the tombstones in the right aisle entailed work in four chapels as listed hereunder. One must note that there is no more mention of Giuseppe Darmanin and his children after the completion of work in the chapels of St. Michael and St Paul. Felice Psaila took over as the master marbler in charge.⁶⁴

A total sum of 2,037 *scudi* 2 *tari* 15 *grani* was spent comprising wages and materials:⁶⁵

59. M. Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400-1900: Painting*, Malta 1987, 162, 166-9, 175, 178; J. Calleja, *Giuseppe Calleja 1828-1915: The Man The Teacher The Artist*, Malta 1992, 33, 35-6, 38, 40-1, 44-8.
60. J. Attard Tabone, 'Michele Busuttil (1762-1831)', in *L-Ghidta' l-Assunta*, no. 26, Ghawdex 1991. See also K. Sciberras, 'Rocco Buhagiar and Late Eighteenth Century Painting in Malta', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Malta, 1995, 190-1 and 200-2.
61. *Pagamento di 13 scudi al Signor Caruana per aver ricopiato la lunga descrizione di tutti i quadri, mausolei e lapide sepolcrali fatta di Professori Hyzler e Busuttil per la causa della Concattedrale': ACM, Dep. vol. 52 (1824-26), f. 754 v.*
62. Cf. *supra*, footnote 45.
63. The master marble artisan's wages amounted to 2 *scudi* per day; assistant craftsmen received either 10 or 8 *tari* depending on their skill, and *segatori* (workmen employed in the cutting and chipping of marble for the provision of the marquetry) received either 6 or 4 *tari* per day: ACM, Dep. vol. 57 (1834-36), ff. 570-581; *ibid.*, 58 (1836-38), ff. 30-41, 177-187, 195, 329-339.
64. Felice was a brother to the sculptor Salvatore but unfortunately he seems to have been forgotten: E. Montanaro, 'Salvatore Psaila 1798-1871', in *Programm tal-Festa ta' l-Immakulata Kuncizzjoni li ssir fil-Knisja Patrijiet Frangiskani Konventwali*, Ghawdex 1983. See also J. C. Camilleri, 'Salvatore Psaila - (1798-1871)', in *Malta Year Book 1994*, 471-7.
65. ACM, *Minuti Capitularum*, vol. 26 (1836-40), ff. 371-381.

Amounts spent on each chapel

Name of Chapel	Scudi	Tari	Grani
St. Michael	270	2	6
St. Paul	242	0	8
St. Catherine	420	4	1
The Epiphany together with the two passages leading to the sacristy and to the lateral door	1,104	8	0
Total:	2,037	2	15

Artisan's average daily wages⁶⁶

Type of craftsman	Wages
master marbler	2 <i>scudi</i>
assistant skilled marbler	10 to 6 <i>tari</i>
marble cutters	6 to 4 <i>tari</i>
marble polishers	6 <i>tari</i>
engravers of letters (<i>intagliatore di caratteri</i>)	10 to 6 <i>tari</i>

Kinds of material purchased and provided for included: different kinds of marble, plaster, ropes, glue, limestone, polishing material like pumice stones, turpentine, cutting tools, palette di ferro, soap, and whatever the trade required for accurate finishing. Giuseppe Hyzler was responsible for this supervision, adequate provision of materials and the execution of the desired work. For these tasks it was suggested that he would receive a remuneration of 850 *scudi*,⁶⁷ but actually he was paid only 600 *scudi*.⁶⁸

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*, ff. 383-384 v.

68. ACM, Dep. vol. 58 (1836-38), ff. 419-420, 27 May 1837.

The combined efforts of all artisans employed, experienced in their particular sphere of activity, had succeeded to leave for posterity a refined decoration in the inscriptions and ornamental characters on the tombstones. However, as time passed, the splendour dimmed and again it has become incumbent upon the government and ecclesiastical authorities to preserve this monument through other necessary repairs. Various suggestions have been made by eminent bodies with a view to minimising damage to the floor. Within the last year a carpet costing Lm4,000 has been provided and put in place to protect it.⁶⁹

69. M. Testa, 'Report on conservation of marble floor at St John's', *The Times* [Malta], 19 April 1997; K. Xuereb, 'Protecting St John's Co-Cathedral Floor', *The Times* [Malta], 16 October 1998; id., 'Lm 4,000 protective cover for St. John's paving', *The Times* [Malta], 2 September 1999; and G. Cini, 'Restored marble memorial back in place at St John's', *The Times* [Malta], 28 February 2000.

Table 1 St. John's tombstones as documented in the notarial archives

Date	Source	Marble artisan	Name of the deceased	Price in scudi	Tombstone numbered according to Scicluna
1 February 1678	NAV, Not. T. Agius R11/51, ff. 644-645	Diego di Tuccio (Messinese)	Fra Renato de Meson-seville	110	number 19
17 August 1678	<i>ibid.</i> , R11/52, ff. 1380-1381.	Bartholomeo Bambacci (from Palermo)	Fra Enrico Destampes Velenicali	120	number 136
12 April 1682	NAV, Not. P. Fiore R265/10, ff. 112', 114'.	Giuseppe Casanova	Fra Luis Loheri Dumoli	125	number 85
28 January 1684	NAV, Not. A. Dello Pie, R227/22 (1682-84), ff. 121'-122' (1683-84).	Giuseppe Casanova	Fra Francesco Conte de Wratissio	100	number 186
30 August 1686	<i>ibid.</i> , R227/23 (1684-86), ff. 424'-425' (1685-86).	Gio Maria Glibert	Fra Gio Ettore de la Tour Maubourg	180	number 255
17 November 1695	<i>ibid.</i> , R227/28 (1694-96), ff. 102'-102' (1695-96).	Gio Maria Glibert	Fra Averardo de Medici	170	number 218
22 August 1726	NAV, Not. G. F. Bagini, R43/4 (1724-26), ff. 190'-191' (1725-26).	Gio Maria Glibert	Fra Felice Conte Lando	200	number 309
7 November 1729	NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R349/29, ff. 117'-118'.	Claudio Durante	Fra Innocenzo Destrestehen	165	number 66

29 October 1730	NAV, Not. F. Alfano, R15/4 (1730-32), ff. 82-82' (1730-31).	Claudio Durante	Fra Hironimo Bagnani	175	number 256
12 March 1732	NAV, Not. G. D. Chiroop, R182/34, ff. 332-333.	Claudio Durante	Bali Sciasber	200	number 187
8 January 1737	<i>ibid.</i> , R182/39, ff. 229'-231'.	Gregorio Durante	Fra Giuseppe de Contreras e Villalrosi	225	number 96
27 February 1737	NAV, Not. G. Callus, R126/41 (1736-38), ff. 264-265 (1736-37).	Claudio Durante	Fra Fabritio Maria Visconti	150	number 362
21 August 1738	NAV, Not. G. D. Chiroop, R182/40, ff. 780-781.	Claudio Durante	Fra Francesco Maria Ferretti	185	number 339
6 July 1741	NAV, Not. G. Callus, R126/43 (1740-42), ff. 514-515 (1740-41).	Antonino Amato (Messinese)	Fra Francesco Villalonga y Caportella	180	number 68
21 July 1743	NAV, Not. G. F. Dos, R238/9, ff. 657-658.	Claudio Durante	Fra Paul de Felines de la Reaudie	170	number 314
22 November 1752	NAV, Not. D. G. Bonavita, R62/38, ff. 212'-214'.	Gio Antonio Durante	Fra Alfonso Loppin	70	number 306
5 September 1819	NAV, Not. C. Sammut, R425/3, ff. 623'-624'.	Carlo Durante	Fra Francesco Carvalho Pinto	300	number 340
9 July 1877	NAV, Not. G. A. Parodi, 1002/175, pp. 1933-1941.	Felice Buhagiar	Dottor Giuseppe Nicolò Zammit	£24.4-2	number 25